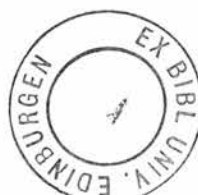


**Constructions of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Scottish and
American Fiction: Ideology and Discourse**

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PhD in English Literature
The University of Edinburgh
1997



Constructions of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Scottish and American Fiction: Ideology and Discourse

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Acknowledgements

In researching and writing this thesis I have received help from many people and institutions. Staff at both Edinburgh University Library and the National Library of Scotland have given valuable advice and friendly attention, and I thank them all. I also wish to register my thanks for the interest and intellectual stimulation received from my tutorial students at Edinburgh University, Napier University (then Polytechnic), and especially at the Scottish Universities International Summer School, over the past five to six years.

The staff of both the English Literature Department and the Faculty of Arts of Edinburgh University have always been helpful, particularly in the latter stages of writing and presentation of this thesis, and I say thank you to them also. The Faculty of Arts also provided the funding to allow me to undertake this degree, and I am grateful to them.

On a more personal level, Dr Richard Francis at Manchester University first interested me in American Literature in the early 1980's, and I would like to express my gratitude and admiration for the style and content of his teaching during my undergraduate years. At Edinburgh University, Colin Nicholson was a great help during the second year of research for this thesis, as was Cairns Craig at the outset. I would also like to say a thank you to Professor Jacques Aubert, now retired from University of Lyon in France, for his kind introduction to that University's library facilities and for his interest in my work.

My family on Merseyside and my friends in Edinburgh have all been as supportive as possible during the years I have been researching and writing this thesis; as they were, of course, previously. Special thanks and affection to Sinead, Kath and Ron.

The encouragement and enthusiasm, as supervisor and friend, shown by Professor Ian Campbell of Edinburgh University for my work, both at Masters and Ph.D. level, has been a great inspiration to me. To list the individual examples of Professor Campbell's help and friendship over the past eight years would take up a few pages of this thesis, so I will just say a simple but deeply felt thank you, Ian.

Abstract

Constructions of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Scottish and American Fiction: Ideology and Discourse

This thesis examines the ways in which various nineteenth-century literary texts articulate the ideological and linguistic production of identity. I argue that the representation of individual and/or collective identity is problematized, and the determinant role of language accorded due weight, in these texts. A contested relationship with imperialist ideology and English 'centrality' in the nineteenth-century is a common factor for both Scottish and American culture: this thesis interrogates the paradigms of 'core-periphery' and 'provincialism' as applied to Scottish and American literature.

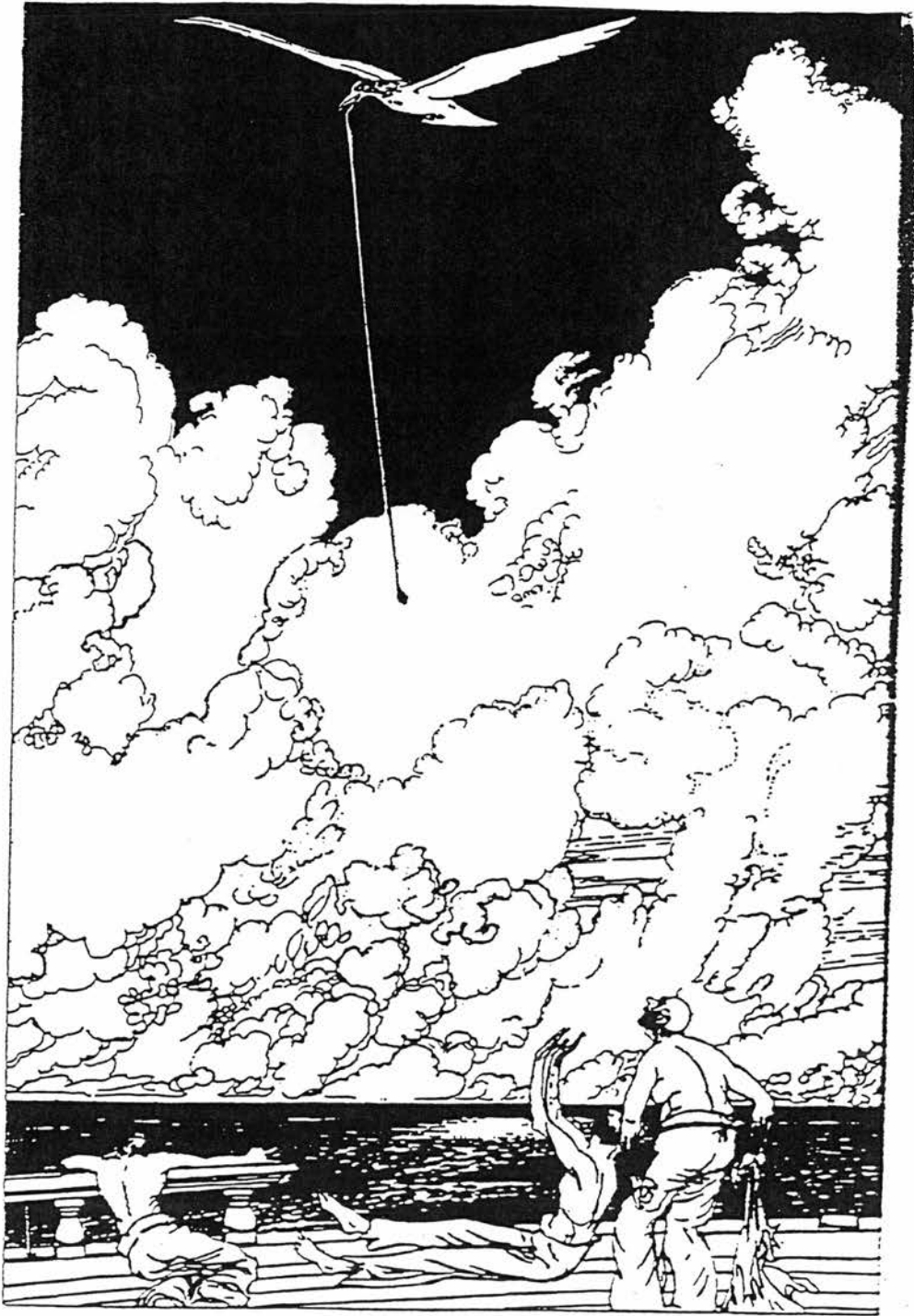
Chapter One considers a number of travel narratives for production of subjectivity and authority—including Washington Irving's *Tour in Scotland*, Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands*, and Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Some of Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories and essays are then read for their ironic constructions of American identity.

Chapter Two considers Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*, locating a critique of imperialist-capitalist practices as they impact on the production of identity.

Chapter Three recontextualizes the Scottish 'Kailyard' as other than melodramatic. Precursors of Kailyard are considered—*Adam Blair* and *Mansie Wauch*—alongside William Alexander's Doric narrative *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* and a classic Kailyard text, J.M. Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls*. Through its formulation of a 'British' Scottish identity, Kailyard embodies as text specific social and ideological contradictions; Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* is seen to self-reflexively deconstruct the genre.

Chapter Four considers Edgar Allan Poe's critique of America's literary 'provincialism', and his call for a specifically American literature as a marker of national identity. Using de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* as historiographic counterpoint, Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* are seen to describe and inscribe a growing American hegemony; however, unlike most critics, I read *Pym* as destabilizing racist ideologies, not buttressing them. Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave' furthers the connections between racism, language and power.

Chapter Five considers Robert Louis Stevenson's problematizing of identity in one 'Scottish' story ('The Merry Men'), and two 'South Seas' stories ('The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb-Tide*). Demonstrating concern with authority and its discursive forms, these narratives register colonialist and capitalist anxiety; and, read from a postcolonialist perspective, they suggest possibilities for 'native' subjectivity and resistance to the homogenizing ideologies of empire and capital.



'There flashed through my mind a thought, a thought which I will not mention',
(*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Edgar Allan Poe)

Introduction

This thesis has developed from what, initially, was an unformulated but strong sense of analogy between major Scottish and American novelists of the nineteenth century. Like Susan Manning, I saw in both nineteenth-century Scottish and American literature ‘certain styles, subjects and preoccupations which characteristically distinguish them from English literature of the same period.’¹

I came to Manning’s superb book while attempting to clarify my own initial ideas on the subject beyond an abstract feeling that these two groupings (for want of a better term) of writers—Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Scott, Stevenson, Hogg, mainly—managed to write narratives of great historical specificity, while seemingly relying upon ambiguity and discursive multivocality to do so. This seemed to me to be so paradoxical that it might just be plain wrong; however, reading *The Puritan-Provincial Vision* (1990) I was encouraged to believe that I was not completely off the mark.

Looking to elucidate the ways in which various nineteenth-century Scottish and American texts construct and deconstruct parameters of identity, the theoretical ground of this thesis is that cultural and social materiality can be textually embodied in the overdeterminations of discursive narrative; that the dialectic of language can produce a complex, but material, reality. The editors of the collection of critical essays *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (1986), did not add ideology to the literature—as they have added the word ‘Ideology’ to D.H. Lawrence’s famous *Classic American Literature* (1924) to form their title—but rather, they examined the ideologies already carried within, and determinant of, the ‘classic’ texts of Melville, Poe, Thoreau, Emerson and others. Henry James’s estimate of Robert Louis Stevenson’s concern with words beyond a simply referential utility fits all of the main writers dealt with in this thesis: ‘he is curious of expression, and regards the literary form not simply as a code of signals, but as the keyboard of a piano and as so much plastic material.’²

The concerns of this thesis are not oppositional to, but complementary of, Susan Manning's in *The Puritan-Provincial Vision*. Similarly, they differ from those of Robert Crawford, not because I disagree with his thesis in *Devolving English Literature* (1992), but because 'how we analyse a work's genetic context is very much dependent upon the conceptual tools of analysis at our disposal. A work's genetic context is not just "there"; it is reconstructed by means of analysis using particular concepts and methods.'³ The intention of my thesis, its 'genetic context', is to examine the ways in which various nineteenth-century writers interrogated the connected but semi-autonomous ideologies of burgeoning capitalism and imperialist expansion (both within and without the borders of North America and Scotland); and, I have focused upon the problematizing of identity as a principal discursive approach within the chosen texts.

As Robert Crawford writes, referring particularly to the work of Susan Manning and Andrew Hook, this thesis proceeds by 'avoiding overlap with these studies, but wishing to strengthen their sense of Scottish-American cultural connections'.⁴ It will become apparent that those critics whose approaches I have found most instructive for my reading of Scottish and American literature are also those with whom I have taken most effort to differ. It seems to me of limited use join the attack on the old shibboleths of Leavisite pragmatism, of which academic tradition, Edward Said caustically writes:

Brought up in the tradition of Cambridge English studies, trained in the techniques of Leavis and Richards, [Raymond] Williams was formed as a literary scholar who had no use whatever for literary theory.⁵

It is of more use now, it would seem to me, to employ the methodology of Said—or Homi K. Bhabha, or Cairns Craig, or Susan Manning, or Williams himself—critically and reflexively if they are not to become as paralyzing a methodology as 'Cambridge English studies'.

So, although Cairns Craig's essays in *Out of History*, Susan Manning's book and articles on 'Scotland and America', and Bhabha's strikingly pro-theoretical postcolonialism provide central points of positive reference for this dissertation—along with Said and Williams—they are approached critically and tangentially. In this way, the core-periphery paradigm, for example—now, surely, a paradigm among paradigms—is employed problematically in this thesis. I have asked myself whether a culture, whether based on an identity of nationality or class, can have any confidence if it sees itself as 'peripheral', if it continually refers to 'the centre' as a specific other place or class, thus accepting, however unconsciously, its own peripherality. The core-periphery axis operates like much postmodernist writing in that it is, paradoxically, both 'complicity and critique.'⁶ The alignment, by Manning for example,⁷ of the parochial with the Modernist, here gains a new if different purchase; and Robert Crawford picks out Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, for its 'combination of the provincial and the international [which] heralds the Modernist enterprise.'⁸

One telling quotation used in chapter 5 of this thesis, is from Robert Louis Stevenson. Quoting—or so he says—a 'native' Samoan, Stevenson records the laconic words of the 'peripheralised' Samoan 'one [...] remarked to me: "I begin to be weary of white men on the beach."⁹ The note of ironic reflexivity in the Samoan's words, with its hint of an as yet undefined threat of indigenous rebellion, is a pointer to many of the ambiguities and ideological dialogues which take place in the texts discussed here.

It is in this mood of contradictory reading that I find in Poe's writings, for example, not merely something beyond the usual psychological conundrum or racist paranoia which has normally been found, but indeed a positive anti-psychologism and a cogent exposure of the deeply racist nature of the American Republic. Poe perfectly exemplifies an author who has given past critics too many easy options. His obvious racism, allowing the critic to gloss over the racism of the culture (including literary culture) from which they would exile Poe. How much easier to do yet another

interpretation of racism in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, or *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, than to see the connections between Poe's racism and the less commented upon racism of the Government and establishment of 'free' America. Critical approaches that seek to annul both the social and political determinants of texts—either by insisting upon an unknowable essence of the literary text, or by separating 'the literary' and 'the social' into discrete epistemes—serve only to mystify the literary process. This thesis tries to negotiate a way between these two supposedly opposing critical camps—the crudely deconstructive and the liberal humanist, respectively; both approaches imply, and applaud, 'the political defusion of writing.'¹⁰

Scotland and America share common ground in the specific ways in which their relationships with, and within, the British Empire, have dominated much of their internal cultural and political debate. It would be perverse to completely deny 'the profound fact that Scotland and North America were provinces, cultural as well as political and economic, of the English-speaking world whose center was London',¹¹ and this thesis does not seek to completely deny it. However, it does seek to problematize this 'fact', to establish those ways in which American and Scottish writers in the nineteenth century were themselves problematizing it; one 'problem' is that Scotland and America were deeply involved in the imperialist process, within and without their own borders, and so were as much core as provincial. In other words, the label 'provinces' denotes not a 'profound fact' but a contested identity; that by the mid and late nineteenth-century, Scotland and America were not poor outcasts 'on the periphery of a greater world'.¹²

That both Scotland and North America produced writers who have attempted to define a specifically national spirit, an identity outwith that of British dependency, seems to me beyond doubt—most obviously in the nineteenth century with Scott and Fenimore Cooper's historical concerns; and in the twentieth century, it is the prioritizing of language itself by Hugh MacDiarmid and William Carlos Williams, which have been in the vanguard. However, it seems equally evident that the very

concept of national identity is deeply problematical; and the writers I have read for this thesis recognise and deal with this to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, although the question of identity *per se* is at the heart of my concern here—whether it be national, regional, class, religious, or individual—it is perhaps fair to say that these writers display an avid distrust of the very concept. In the case of Scottish writers, the distrust of the concept of a national identity, which this thesis intends to illustrate, lends heavy irony to the fact that ‘almost all accounts of Scottish literature are discussed in terms of national identity.’¹³

One central problem to be addressed in this thesis is whether or not it is theoretically—or, ideologically—justifiable to address questions of the internal colonialism practised in Britain and North America in the same manner as the colonialism practised by these nations abroad. The distinctions which need to be drawn between, for example, clearances in the Scottish Highlands and full-scale invasion and colonization in Africa and the Pacific have to be drawn bearing in mind what is analogous in these very different situations; in particular, language seems to be used in a certain way in both internal and overseas manifestations of colonialist practice. Hugh MacDiarmid’s labyrinthine poem, ‘In Memoriam James Joyce’, characterizes Scotland as a robotic, hypnotised idiot:

The eyes can pull the whole body about and adjust
Hands, trunk, and position of head
For the purpose of preparing the frame and active muscles
For instantaneous motor action in connection with sight.

Scotland has not developed or has lost
That provision or allowed it to become atrophied.
It cannot move its own members about
But is hypnotically controlled from London.
Scotland has nothing clear in its own mind.¹⁴

Tom Nairn is characteristically blunt in his rejection of the claim that Scotland is a colonized culture. Not only is Scotland’s situation not analogous to that of African, Asian or Pacific nations, he writes in ‘The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism’; it is not even analogous with that of Ireland:

Scotland is not a colony, a semi-colony, a pseudo-colony, a near-colony, a neo-colony, or any kind of colony of the English. She is a junior but (as these things go) highly successful partner in the general business enterprise of Anglo-Scots imperialism. Now that this business is evidently on its last legs, it may be quite reasonable for the Scots to want out. But there is really no point in disguising this desire with heroic ikonry. After all, when the going was good for imperialism, the world heard very little of the Scots' longing for independence.¹⁵

Nairn later amended his anti-nationalist argument, from 'Scotland is not a colony', to 'Scotland is not a colonized culture, but a *self*-colonized one.'¹⁶

One difference which should not be ignored is the fact that America was emerging as an independent power—imperial and otherwise—and Scotland was declining—separately, and as part of Britain; in literature, this seems to have been mediated by a strangely analogous search for rootedness in the past. America—having never had history (see Washington Irving), meaning Enlightenment, written, white 'history'—either had to write one (Cooper, Hawthorne), or deny the historical imperative (Emerson). Scotland, having lost its history into a Hanoverian prosaic state, had to rewrite it to fulfil the emptiness of the present (Scott, Lockhart, Hogg). The writers read for this thesis resist the simplistic forging (or re-forging, for Scotland) of a national identity in past history—they see the past as problematical.

Following the premise that the past informs the present, I have tried to draw upon what is both historically and textually pertinent in the texts read for this thesis. As Frederic Jameson tells us, it is not enough to embrace past disciplines uncritically;¹⁷ but it is even less satisfactory to dismiss past works because they are from an earlier, different historical epoch. Such dismissiveness—a refusal to engage with the alterity of the past—weakens rather than strengthens, for example, Granville Hicks's ideologically-impassioned construction of an American literary 'Great Tradition'. For Hicks, the multideterminate difference of a text like *Moby-Dick* is invisible: 'Were Melville's records of lands beyond the grasp of industrialism the proper inspiration for young men whose eyes were focussed on the march of steel rails and

whose ears were tuned to the hum of engines?', he asks.¹⁸ In fact, it is as an interrogation of the capitalist 'march' that Melville's work might be most usefully read.

If, as Lyotard has argued, 'the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses,'¹⁹ what ways of reading can be found which retain an awareness of the ideological productivity of language, and a sensitivity to the resistances set up by narrative? Is there a 'mode of unification' which addresses the problems both of history and of discourse? Is history so textual/contextual that 'neither the redemptive myth of Marxism nor its historical rhetoric can conceal from us [...] its inadequacy as a critical discourse'?²⁰

This thesis intends to recontextualize the parameters of Scottish and American writing in the nineteenth-century by always holding the realities of capitalist-imperialist practice of the time as a marker. That the identity-categories of class, nation and individual are interrogated by these texts is my basic premise; however, it is not my intention to 'wish' these constructs away, 'to seek to live sheer irreducible difference *now*'.²¹ Linda Hutcheon tellingly attacks a recent propensity to denigrate the very notion of agency; she argues that only socially privileged elites—already in control of their own subjectivity—can afford the luxury of pure differentiation: 'radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.'²²

Rather, I hope to suggest future strategies for the reading of texts which, I feel, are cross-generic in being both colonialist and postcolonialist in their workings. As Homi Bhabha argues, 'the question of the representation of difference is [...] always a question of authority';²³ and, as identity-categories are a direct product of differentiation, then it follows that identity is matter of authority, but a problematical one because of the ironic self-deconstruction of discursive modes. Literary constructions of identity can emphasize the matrix of class, nation, gender and language which constitute the overdetermined and dialectical structures of identity.

By paying attention to the ways in which identity is formulated in text, we can avoid the twin traps of depoliticized non-referentiality and simplistic homogeneity.

Notes to Introduction

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16. Tom Nairn, 'Scottish Identity: A Cause Unwon', *Études Écossaises*, 1 (1992), 21-38 (p.27).
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18. Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (New York, 1935), pp.4-5.
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21. Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment*, Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature Pamphlet, no. 13 (Derry, 1988), p.5.
22. Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the Downspout of Empire', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (1995; rpt. London, 1995), pp.130-135 (p.131).
23. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; rpt. London, 1995), p.89.

Chapter 1

Beyond the 'Provincial': Travellers and Hawthorne's Americans

1. Travelling Literary Subjects

The famous 'Author's Account of Himself', introducing Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, (1819), articulates a sense of Europe's historical presences, in opposition to America's historical absences:

I visited various parts of my own country; and had I been merely a lover of fine scenery, I should have felt little desire to seek elsewhere its gratification, for on no country have the charms of Nature been more prodigally lavished. Her mighty lakes, like oceans of liquid silver; her mountains with their bright aërial tints.¹

And Irving continues, listing and praising America's 'tremendous cataracts', 'boundless plains', and 'trackless forests'. This is America as plenitude. However, Irving then mentions what America lacks:

But Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly-cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement—to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity, to loiter about the ruined castle, to meditate on the falling tower, to escape, in short, from the commonplace realities of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past.²

The 'storied and poetical association' which Irving attributes as Europe's special privileges can be traced in his account of his visit to Scotland in 1817, during which time he was working on *The Sketch Book* itself. Irving's notes of this 'tour' are particularly illuminating as a textual example of how identity, both personal and national, can be discursively constructed. The manuscript notes of the visit were first

edited and published with a critical introduction in 1927, by Stanley T. Williams.³ The debt owed to Williams's scholarship by biographers of Irving, or indeed of Scott, is not a concern of this thesis; what is of concern is the light that Irving's fairly random jottings throw upon the relationship between the writing subject and the observed world. Charles Dickens, recording disappointment at the actuality of the America he encountered on his visit, wrote that it was 'not the republic of my imagination.'⁴ However, in his *Tour of Scotland* notes, Irving would seem to be recording an encounter with a Scotland which is precisely that of his imagination.

Sailing from England to Scotland, Irving imagines the latter as a reproduction of Walter Scott's deliberately archaic and fanciful 'Marmion', and he notes down the following lines from the second canto of that poem:

And next they crossed themselves to hear
The whitening breakers sound so near,
Where, boiling through the rocks, they roar
On Dunstanborough's caverned shore;
Thy tower, proud Bamborough, marked they there,
King Ida's castle, huge and square,
From its tall rock look grimly down,
And on the swelling ocean frown.

('Marmion', Canto the Second, lines 144-151)

Irving's conception of the east coast of Scotland is, then, directly attributed to Scott's writing; Scotland is romantic, dangerous, metaphorically soaked in history, ancient and stubborn. Throughout his manuscript notes, Irving refers back to Scott's writing as a source of his own reaction; where we might expect a writer of Irving's wit and cosmopolitan experience, to question his own 'reading' of Scotland's identity upon experiencing the actuality of the place, in fact he does the opposite and further works up his own imagining of Scotland to match his preconceptions. The 'Scotland' of Irving's *Tour Notes* is a discrete literary object, on which Washington Irving's subjective gaze falls.

In its description of particular places, the *Tour*'s representation of Scotland seems most to depend upon the romantic and literary paradigms of Scott's Scotland. Walt Whitman was to lampoon Irving as having been 'suckled on the Addisonian-Oxford-Cambridge milk',⁵ and in the *Tour* it is in the non-Americanness of Scottish literary tradition that Irving finds his subject. The capital city of Scotland appears as an object for his consideration and commodification: 'Edinburgh remarkably picturesque & romantic in its general appearance. Smoke rising from houses between new & old town, & lighted up by the morning sun, gives a fine aerial effect to the rock & castle & throws the old town into masses.'⁶ Edinburgh is here mediated as artistic artefact rather than as a place in which people live and work; as a deliberately aesthetic rendering of the city, this is a transparent instance of Irving's means of textual signification in the *Tour*. The emphasis is upon the picturesque and the 'general'.

The fragmentary nature of the *Tour* notes materially reproduces the practical inconvenience of writing while bodily moving, and also registers the non-linear (and non-narrative) processes of human thought; and the text can be read as a material refiguring of these two facts. In the following passage, Irving invests what are after all mere notes with a directness, but also with a poetical elision of meaning and reference:

Contrast feelings awakened in visiting Scotland with those of Italy
 Scotch situations [?] come nearer to my heart. witching songs of the
 nursery earliest days of my childhood-my puir byried sister-auld lang
 syne-nothing remarkable in scenery of the country to the luxuriant
 scenery I have beheld-but they have tied [?] the charms of poetry on
 every river[?] hill & grey rock made [?] the desert to blossom as the rose-
 -old buildings-clothed with poetry as with ivy [.]⁷

The mixing of a heightened subjectivity of personal lived experience—'my puir byried sister'—with literary affectation makes for a stark contrast in this passage. Particularly, though, Scotland is identified as a setting for poetry; for Irving, it is a country defined by its literature and for many travellers of the nineteenth century

Scotland's identity depended upon its representation by its own writers, especially Scott and Burns.

When Irving selectively rewrote, as 'Abbotsford', his Scottish tour in order to highlight his stay with Walter Scott, the 'romance' of Scotland was even more deliberately constructed: 'it seemed as if a little realm of romance was suddenly opened before me [...] not a mountain, or valley, a town, or tower, green shaw or running stream, in Scotland but has some popular air connected with it, that makes its very name a key note to a whole train of delicious fancies and feelings.'⁸ The reproduction of a place, Scotland, as literary trope—'realm of romance'—is both ideologically and aesthetically important: the fact that 'its very name' spells literary pleasure fills Scotland with a signification dependent upon the values and desires of the literary traveller and reader. It is important to realize that Irving's textual appropriation of Scotland is not merely an act of the individual ego, but is a telling of example of an discursive trope: the visitor to Scotland *reading* the topography and people via the dominant literary figure, Scott, who is himself read via Macpherson's Ossianic 'discoveries'.

Some of the *Tour* notes read like outlines for a particularly banal and sentimental novel set in Scotland, whereas I read them as ideological markers. What makes such passages curious is not their unlikelihood or any intrinsic comedic quality, but that they are symptomatic of a mode of seeing, and more importantly, a mode of representation; in Scotland, Irving sees what he wants to see, and faithfully notes these *observations*: 'Falkirk cattle fair on a moor. Highlanders in plaids-See but one or two in kilts. small black cattle. Sheep with black faces & legs. The road[s?] are full of droves of cattle pouring along towards Falkirk picturesque figures of herdsmen with highland blue bonnets-plaids wrapped round them & staff under the arm. Shepherd dogs following-small men of hardy sunburnt countenances.'⁹ Rather than reading this as a reified reflection of Irving's personal psychology, I read it as an example of how linguistic representation is a social relation. Stephen Greenblatt's account of Columbus's narratives expresses this correlation:

The sightings are important only in relation to what Columbus already knows and what he can write about them on the basis of that knowledge [...].

The paradox of the meaningful—or perhaps we can simply say the full—sign is that it is empty in the sense of hollow or transparent: a glass through which Columbus looks to find what he expects to find, or, more accurately perhaps, a foreign word he expects to construe and to incorporate into his own language.¹⁰

I believe this is what we read in Irving's *Tour*; an incorporation and re-presentation of Scotland as picturesque literary palimpsest upon which Irving projects his expectations. In an even more revealing passage, Irving's notes record, 'pass some fine heath-read *macbeth*-As the road approaches Dunkeld it becomes extremely grand-Tay wind thro romantic scenery'. The narrator's role, as he sees it, is to read in order to imbibe the 'romance' of Scotland; so that when he comes upon, 'Two drunken fellows staggering from the fair singing a pastoral of Burns', the sentimentalism has been normalized.¹¹ The American traveller is reading Scotland as if it were a book, a book he has written, or would write.

Washington Irving, citizen of one of 'England's cultural provinces', is here formulating assumptions similar to those of the English core.¹² The dominant ideological discourse for Irving is literary as opposed to economic or political; his *Tour* represents Scotland as literary artefact. Likewise, in the revised version which is 'Abbotsford', the topography of Irving's imagined Scotland is made analogous to the actual topography of land:

When I retired for the night, I found it almost impossible to sleep, the idea of being under the roof of Scott, of being on the borders of the Tweed, in the very centre of that region which had for some time past, been the favourite scene of romantic fiction [...] all fermented in my mind and nearly drove sleep from my pillow.¹³

Irving's 'Abbotsford' produces poetic and literary 'regions', and the actual region of the Borders is made an adjunct to its figurative existence in Scott's poetry and the Border Ballads as 'the favourite scene of romantic fiction'.

Margaret Fuller, another nineteenth-century American traveller in Scotland, is as fully engaged in the project of romancing as Irving. In *At Home and Abroad* (1856) she writes of her own visit to the Trossachs and the Highlands: ‘All this region, and that of Loch Katrine and the Trossachs, which we reached next day, Scott has described exactly in “The Lady of the Lake” [...] I was somewhat disappointed in the pass of the Trossachs itself; it is very grand, but the grand part lasts so little while.’¹⁴ Fuller’s representation of Scotland as a place of narrative, where the subjective consciousness can demand signification, is betrayed in the words ‘lasts so little while’, which place the topographical world in subservience to the traveller’s moving body (and hence moving eye); the traveller, in Fuller’s imagined world, moves through the landscape as a reader through a story. Karl Marx, in *Capital*, tested the literary paradigm of ‘the promised land of romantic literature, the Highlands of Scotland’ against the historical fact of the exploitative practices of both capital and clan chiefs during the Clearances; the paradigm is found wanting.¹⁵

A later passage in Fuller’s book explicates further this reproducing of Scotland as *textual matter*, and the country becomes the book: ‘All the rest must wait awhile. I cannot economize time to keep up my record in proportion with what happens, nor can I *get out of Scotland on this page*, as I had intended, without utterly slighting many gifts and graces’(emphasis mine).¹⁶ This is a self-conscious travel narrative, and this reflexivity assumes that Scotland has entered its pages. When Fuller, lost on a Highland mountain, imagines herself in the role of Ossianic hero—and it is as hero, rather than heroine, that she sees herself—it completes the assimilation of writer, place and romance: ‘saw nothing more, except such apparitions as visited Ossian on the hill-side when he went out by night and struck the basky shield and called to him the spirits of the heroes and the white-armed maids with their blue eyes of grief.’¹⁷

Interestingly, the English traveller Frances Trollope’s account of her stay in America, produces a similarly aesthetic trace of the places she encountered: ‘The state prison of Sing Sing is upon the edge of the water, and has no picturesque effect to atone for

the painful images it suggests; the 'Sleepy Hollow' of Washington Irving, just above it, restores the imagination to a better tone.'¹⁸ The 'imagination' is disturbed by reality and needs, ironically enough, the suggestiveness of Washington Irving's fiction to restore tranquility—the land of romance is a land of aesthetic harmony for the literary traveller.

In a number of passages, Trollope abandons any attempt at an objective account of her experiences and writes of Christian revivalist meetings as Nathaniel Hawthorne was to write of Young Goodman Brown's confrontation with the warping effects of denied sociality. Some excerpts from different accounts by Trollope of such religious events give an idea of the whole:

Young girls arose, and sat down, and rose again; and then the pews opened, and several came tottering out, their hands clasped, their heads hanging on their bosoms, and every limb trembling, and still the hymn went on [...].

The prostrate penitents continued to receive whispered comfortings, and from time to time a mystic caress. More than once I saw a young neck encircled by a reverend arm [...].

Above a hundred persons, nearly all females, came forward, uttering howlings and groans so terrible that I shall never cease to shudder when I recall them [...].

Many of these wretched creatures were beautiful young females. The preachers moved about among them, at once exciting and soothing their agonies. I heard the muttered 'Sister! dear sister!' I saw the insidious lips approach the cheeks of the unhappy girls; I heard the murmured confessions of the poor victims, and I watched their tormentors, breathing into their ears consolations that tinged the pale cheek with red.¹⁹

The specific reported reality, sexual abuse by 'insidious' evangelical 'preachers', is inscribed through heightened romantic physicality and sensibility; emphasis is placed on the physicality of the limbs and kisses. Trollope renders as aesthetically sublime the 'beautiful young females'; and, although we must read the account as a record of a particular abuse of power, it can also be understood as a marker of cultural determination. American revivalism is here represented—by the English traveller—

as a 'tormentor' of innocent beauty, and we can again usefully cite Stephen Greenblatt in this context:

Any given representation is not only the reflection or product of social relations but [...] is itself a social relation, linked to the group understandings, status hierarchies, resistances, and conflicts that exist in other spheres of the culture in which it circulates. This means that representations are not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being.²⁰

Greenblatt seems here to rework for textual application Althusser's theoretical formulation of Ideological State Apparatuses, which postulates that the modes of production of ideologies must and do reproduce themselves in order to survive.²¹ Frances Trollope's travel narrative reproduces the mode of its own production—the heightened sensibilities of the romantic subject. As with the travel narratives of Irving and Fuller, it is the interconnectedness between the particular text and the modes of writing—and seeing the world—with which it has similarities that are of interest here. By romancing Scotland, in the cases of Irving and Fuller, or, in the case of Trollope, denigrating American social practices, these various texts reproduce specific ideological formulations of nationhood and individual subjectivity. In his book *Imagining America*, Peter Conrad criticizes Trollope's writing for its narrow-mindedness: 'Travel for Mrs Trollope isn't exploration, but the fortification of prejudice. She goes abroad to justify her preference for staying at home.'²² However, this assertion ignores the problematics of constructed subjectivity and identity, concentrating instead on a reified, individual consciousness of Frances Trollope. The textual rhetoricity of *Domestic Manners of the Americans* is ignored in Conrad's account, and it is read as a straightforward set of opinions.

Trollope's account of America is determined, like Washington Irving and Margaret Fuller's Scottish narratives, by the specific ideological tropes, and representational practices, which are brought to bear on the observed material of Scotland and America. For the nineteenth-century American traveller, Scotland is historical, it has significant resonance from its literary products; the 'meaning' of Scotland is, in this

formulation, its history as imagined by Scott, Burns and Macpherson. What America lacks for these travellers is exactly this: a narrated history with its full panoply of heroes and villains, victories and defeats. Scotland has all of these and so is always already commodified as a text. White America was still composing its own national romances; Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, with their grounding in Walter Scott-ish narrative, are perhaps the most obvious example of a deliberate attempt to historicize the American landscape, to give it significant meaning. In *Notions of the Americans*, Cooper spells out quite clearly the task of American culture: 'The Rhine, with its cities, its hundred castles, and its inexhaustible recollections, has charms of its own, but when time shall lend to the Hudson the interest of a deeper association, its passage will, I think, be pronounced unequal'.²³ Topography, then, needs to be invested with significance by human 'association', it does not just have it.

Again, we notice that the perspective is that of the traveller reading the landscape on passing it by; significantly, it is white, Eurocentric culture which gives meaning, because it alone, by implication, is readable—the relevance and accuracy of this assertion will become clearer when I look at Samuel Johnson's *Tour of Scotland*. Cooper's valorizing of the American landscape accords with Robert Crawford's assertion that 'both Scott and Cooper were writing sequences to entertain and to unify societies that were multicultural, and to give them pride in their distinctive national attributes'.²⁴ The social narrative and the investing of the natural world with 'meaning' are two sides of the same ideological project—the construction of national identity, and the search for national subjectivity. It is important to recognize that the society which Crawford sees Scott as writing 'to unify' is not Scotland, but Britain; for Crawford, '*Waverley* is the consummate British novel'.²⁵

By reading Scott as both a British and Scottish writer, and thereby opening up questions about the validity of such terminology in literary studies, Crawford's thesis has ideological import. The idea that Scott, and his immediate and obvious precursor James Macpherson, were promoting a British as much as a Scottish sense of identity, is also put forward by Leith Davis who writes that 'the Ossianic poems portray an

unconquered Britain holding out against the onslaughts of invaders, and it is a Britain that both the English and Scots can identify with.’²⁶ The question of whether Scottish tartanry *per se* is part of an incorporating British identity, or a nationalistic Scottish one, is raised by Cairns Craig with some vigour in his essay ‘Absences’:

The iconography of the Highlander, adopted as a badge of national identification by the Lowland Scot in the nineteenth century, is not the iconography of a separate Scottish identity: it is, in fact, the iconography of the unity of the British state. George IV’s visit to Edinburgh in 1822, orchestrated by Sir Walter Scott, was not, in its presentation of the gross monarch in Highland garb, a token of embryonic Scottish nationalism but a symbolic readmittance into the British *Geist* of that part of the nation which had alienated itself by the 1715 and the 1745 uprisings, but had paid its debts by dying profusely on the Heights of Abraham and at Waterloo. [...] Tartan is a symbol of Scottishness not in defiance of its integration into the UK, but as the very token of that integration.²⁷

Some critics have similarly read the Kailyard as a ‘British’ rather than a ‘Scottish’ phenomenon—a point to be discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Obviously the subsuming of Scottish into British literature produces a problematic for a thesis, such as this, which seeks to reveal the working of, and a resistance to, an imperialist-capitalist ideology within Scottish and American fiction of the nineteenth century.

It is worth mentioning in this context a rather more obscure travel narrative by Alexander Dunlop, a Scottish minister who visited America in 1826.²⁸ Dunlop’s brief account of his experiences is interesting in that it consciously points up the ideological preconceptions which travel writers always bring to their narratives, and to the interconnectedness of the supposedly different narrative modes of fiction and factual observation. Professing himself to be sturdily anti-republican, Dunlop jokily refers to his misgivings over writing on America, as ‘all writers had more or less given offence to the sons of freedom [...] I was reluctant to increase the number of monarchical delinquents’; however, ‘the democratic explosion in France the other day’—he writes in 1848—the ‘subsequent plunder of some shops in Glasgow’ and Edinburgh’s ‘partial riot’, force Dunlop’s hand. However, his account is not a vitriolic attack upon American democracy.²⁹

Referencing Frances Trollope's account of her travels, Dunlop allows the ambiguity of his phrasing to suggest to his reader that textual meaning is always produced, it is never just there. Of *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, he writes 'I believe every word she writes to be true; but yet I believe her book, viewed as a picture of American manners, to be totally the reverse [...] a clever woman, but a partial writer. She is now in her element, confined to fiction.'³⁰ This wry judgement has to be read in the context of what Dunlop says of his own narrative, the partiality of which he is no less aware:

I speak of America as I saw it in the action of the people, as springing from her civil institutions and her social state [...] I bowed in deferential homage to the genius of democracy. I was of the audience in the drama of ancient story; I found myself, in a measure, behind the curtain, in beholding the melo-drama of modern democracy. It modified impressions made in my youth. I reflect their images, though the shadows may be faint. They may in degree be imperfect. No man's eyes fully see things as they are; and prejudice will warp the mind of the most enlightened.³¹

The commercial energy of America, 'a region of ceaseless speculation', is supplanted in Dunlop's narrative by a sense of sympathy. The historical association sought by Fenimore Cooper, the sense of romantic adventure that Margaret Fuller finds when lost in the Highlands, are discovered—that is, produced—by Dunlop in America. And, even more strikingly, they reside in the fact that Dunlop sees in America images of a lost land of romance and simple faith. And the lost land is—inevitably (?)—Scotland.

The Scottish minister finds Scotland's 'lost' past in America. One passage begins with a poignant and witty play on words: 'I delighted in New England. It reminded me of old Scotland. Its primitive manners, its prevailing faith, its decorous habits, all brought home to my remembrance; but home, not amidst the turmoils of our manufacturing industry, but amidst the glens and the hills, which the cotton aristocracy have not yet pierced'. Industrial hegemony is resisted by memory, memory assisted by the reality of New England. Dunlop becomes even more specific

in tracing this sympathy: 'It struck me that there was something congenial in the mind of New England with the peculiar thought and feeling of Scotland,—something alike in the tenor of its sentiment and the quality of its reason, springing, it may be, from the Word of God having wrought its influence on the minds of both'.³²

Drawing attention to specifically theological and discursive aspects of Scottish and New England culture, Dunlop is responding to what Susan Manning has termed 'the puritan-provincial vision.' And it is in the specific discourse of Calvinist theology—as especially practised by Jonathan Edwards—that Manning locates the production of what Dunlop calls, more casually, a 'peculiar thought and feeling'. In some ways, I am in this thesis trying to engage with those aspects of nineteenth-century Scottish and American literature which Manning's work points to but does not develop in detail; namely, economic and political practices which fully problematize the idea of America or Scotland as provincial.

But as a final, and most telling, instance of the discursive production of a particular, commodified, rendering of Scotland, I want to consider Samuel Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, in 1773*.³³ In his account, Johnson accords the Scottish land and the people—the Highlanders in particular—the role of colonial dominion. The contested nature of national identity is, for Johnson, not contested at all.

Johnson's record of his travels locates the actual topography of the Scottish Highlands within a particular economic and political matrix:

From Glencoe we passed through a pleasant country to the banks of Loch Lomond, and were received at the house of Sir James Colquhoun, who is owner of almost all the thirty islands of the Loch, which we went in a boat to survey. The heaviness of the rain shortened our voyage, but we landed on one island planted with yew and stocked with deer, and on another containing perhaps not more than half an acre, remarkable for the ruins of an old castle, on which the osprey builds her annual nest. Had Loch Lomond been in a happier climate, it would have been the boast of wealth and vanity to own one of the little spots which it encloses, and to

have employed upon it all the arts of embellishment. But as it is, the islets, which court the gazer at a distance, disgust him at his approach, when he finds, instead of soft lawns and shady thickets, nothing more than uncultivated ruggedness.³⁴

Here, the physical landscape is subordinated to the subjectivity of 'the gazer' and his aesthetic 'disgust'. Far from being pleased at the unspoilt nature of the islets of Loch Lomond, Johnson feels 'disgust'; lacking 'embellishments', the climate and 'uncultivated ruggedness' of Loch Lomond and its environs fail Johnson's test of desirability.

In a critique of the visual aesthetic of Walt Whitman's poetry, David Simpson points up possible links between the modalities of romantic subjectivity and the ideological practice of subordination; links which are apposite in considering Johnson's text: 'as Wordsworth and other Romantics knew well, the eye is the most despotic of the senses; its activity presupposes a distance between the seer and the seen, and thus opens up a space for the potential inscription or assumption of a hierarchy, a posture of lordliness of the seer over the seen.'³⁵

Elsewhere in *A Journey to the Western Islands*, Johnson writes that 'no man should travel unprovided with instruments for taking heights and distances', and it is this insistence upon the measuring and controlling of the environment which motivates much of Johnson's account.³⁶ The Scottish Highlands are read by Johnson as a foreign language; they are translated for his English readership into a textual world of simple certainties and authoritarian utterances. What is unknown to Johnson, he dismisses as unknowable and fundamentally alien:

Of the Erse language, as I understand nothing, I cannot say more than I have been told. It is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood [...] the Erse merely floated in the breath of the people and could therefore receive little improvement.

When a language teems with books, it is tending to refinement [...]. Speech becomes embodied and permanent.³⁷

From Johnson's metropolitan perspective, language itself becomes an object, a thing for 'improvement', just like the land. Johnson's text, in its rhetorical mode and its polemical meaning, is a material example of what Benedict Anderson posits as the crucial part played by 'print-capitalism' in the creation of national identities. 'Print-capitalism', writes Anderson, 'gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation.'³⁸ Johnson's insistence upon the superiority of the English language is predicated on the fact that English is a printed language—that is, a language which reproduces itself materially.

In Johnson's book, the values of the metropolitan core are imposed upon the 'barbarous people' of the periphery. Johnson's self-adopted authority is just one significant textual example of the way in which the dominant culture within a bi-cultural relationship can produce for itself an explanation and a rationalization of the subordinate culture's supposed inferiority. The narrative of human history, the physical realities of topography are subsumed in an overarching system of signification in which the ideology of the dominant culture is made normative. As Peter Womack puts it:

Of course, the claim is made that the core culture is better, or that its effect on the periphery is benign, But this is not the main ideological embodiment of the asymmetrical power relations. Rather, what counts is the proposition, unchallengeably diffused and repeated throughout the discourse of Improvement, that the core's representation of the world is not a representation at all, but *reality*. The Highlands are subordinated to the sign-system of the metropolis, not on the basis that the latter is superior, but on the basis that it is inescapable. You don't have to prefer it, because it is in any case coercive.³⁹

The colonial paradigm that Womack establishes in *Improvement and Romance* perceives the literary representation of the Highlands as symptomatic, and typical, of a relationship of domination and subordination. In other words, the core defines the periphery.

However, this paradigm of core and periphery is problematical because, as Cairns Craig argues, by consistently comparing itself with a core culture, a periphery, however inadvertently, becomes assimilated into that culture.⁴⁰ Acceptance of peripherality produces the coercive danger of seeking to copy the core: to become central. Samuel Johnson's writing on the Highlands proudly, and blindly, exhibits the ideological presumptions of the literate eighteenth-century English metropolis—but, Craig argues, Scottish writers and commentators should not follow suit by constantly comparing Scottish culture with English. The irony is heavy in the second paragraph of Craig's essay, 'Peripheries':

Not having a culture or a history which is shaped exactly like those of a major European culture (whose are, except the major cultures?), not having conformed to the pattern of those cultures whose 'progress' is taken to define progression itself, we are only the echo of real events, real achievements, real creations that have already occurred somewhere else—somewhere that is by some magical transformation also the world.⁴¹

The point is well taken. After all, who would call George Eliot, the best-known writer of 'parish' novels, 'parochial' in the pejorative sense in which it is often used for Scottish writers?

In what ways, then, do the texts which I will look at for the rest of this thesis question the assumptions of the core-periphery paradigm? How do Hawthorne, Melville and Poe write with a distinctively American voice, or voices? How does the Kailyard or Robert Louis Stevenson's stories produce a particularly Scottish historical and linguistic world? I believe the answers to these questions lie not so much in simplistic national distinctions, as in the material ways in which language produces and disseminates ideology and resistances to ideology. The particular motivations of capitalist and imperialist practices erase much of what is national about language. 'Identity' is a problem in these texts, not a solution.

2. Hawthorne & Americans

It is a peculiar but demonstrable element of much Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing that its famously ambiguous language and meaning is grounded in very specific historical tropes. As an initial path to a reading of Hawthorne's texts for their problematizing of identity, I want to consider two very different critical approaches, so as to suggest a third methodology. In the following quotations, the major difference is in emphasis upon historical determinacy.

Writing of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Jeremy Hawthorn asserts that:

Stevenson's classic study of dual consciousness can only be fully understood if it is seen not as a statement of the universal dualism of humankind, torn between good and evil (which is, admittedly, how Stevenson may have seen it), but as a work which arises out of the particular tensions and contradictions of Victorian society.⁴²

Insisting on a contextual reading of the literary text, Hawthorn's is a fairly straightforward materialist analysis; it suggests fiction can 'only be fully understood' through a thorough knowledge of the particular social milieu from which it 'arises'.

A second, and very different approach, is that of Wolfgang Iser, who, in a general commentary on 'indeterminacy and reader's response', states that:

Of course, no one will deny that literary texts do contain a historical substratum, but the manner in which literature takes it up and communicates it does not seem to be determined by merely historical circumstances, but by the specific aesthetic structure inherent in it [...]. It is we who bring the text to life.⁴³

Iser places the burden of interpretation on the reader; and while accepting, albeit grudgingly, that the text contains a 'historical substratum, it is clear that he sees this as a secondary agent in the production of narrative discourse, of less importance than the reader's creation of meaning through a comprehension of an 'inherent' formal element.

What then links these two quotations is precisely what divides them—an emphasis upon the greater or lesser importance of 'history' as a determining factor in textual interpretation. If we follow Jeremy Hawthorn, the text is fully conditioned by its historical moment of production; for Iser, history is only a 'substratum' which literature 'takes [...] up and communicates' semi-autonomously. What both critiques seem to lack is an appreciation of the overdetermined character of textual discourse. I hope to show the fallacy inherent in any attempt to 'fully' understand all the potentialities of a literary text; but also to critically question whether a text is separable from its historical conditions of production. I believe some postcolonialist—and some Marxist—critical approaches provide fruitful ways of reading literature as embodied ideology, and at the same time as dialectically resistant to ideology.

In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to discuss some of the stories first collected by Nathaniel Hawthorne as *Mosses from an Old Manse*; also, I will develop my argument by brief consideration of the quite different, but historically and geographically connected, work of Emerson.

Much of the contemporaneous critical appraisal of Hawthorne's writing concerned itself with allegorical readings, an interpretative methodology which my concern with historicity and textuality will necessarily question. In his most paradoxical mode, Edgar Allan Poe argues that the capacity of allegory to excite or entertain the reader is dependent upon its seeming not to be an allegory. Reviewing some of Hawthorne's tales, Poe passes typically and supremely abrasive judgement on a privileged text in the English literary canon:

That 'The Pilgrim's Progress' is a ludicrously over-rated book, owing its seeming popularity to one or two of those accidents in critical literature which by the critical are sufficiently well understood, is a matter upon which no two thinking people disagree; but the pleasure derivable from it, in any sense, will be found in the direct ratio of the reader's capacity to smother its true purpose, in the direct ratio of his ability to keep the allegory out of sight, or of his *inability* to comprehend it.⁴⁴

Condemning allegory as a reductive form of reading, Poe argues that the only hope for an allegorical text lies in the reader's ignorance of its meaning. Poe's anti-allegorical stance suggests an understanding of the multivocality of literary texts; and in the case of Hawthorne, this multivocality needs to be argued for insistently if it is not, even today, to be drowned beneath allegorical and proverbial readings, however 'ironic' they might claim to be. Before considering the capacity of Hawthorne's texts to engender ironic readings of identity, specifically formulations of identity grounded in nineteenth-century individualist rhetoric, I want to highlight the interpretative paradigm—the generic label 'puritan'—which connects much recent criticism with that Hawthorne received from his contemporaries.

In an exemplary model of what Pierre Macherey has termed the 'normative fallacy'—in which 'the work should be other than it is [...] corrected and effectively modified by continuous comparison with the model which has an independent, *a priori* existence',⁴⁵—S.W.S. Dutton, a Connecticut pastor, reviewing *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1847, writes :

Hawthorne is generally quite successful, when he employs the supernatural. But, sometimes, he makes the lesson he would teach thereby so obscure, that it is not apprehended by many readers, who, to say the least, are not obtuse. For instance. His story of 'Young Goodman Brown' is designed to teach a moral lesson. But the design fails of accomplishment by the obscurity of execution. The lesson is not apprehended by nine out of ten intelligent readers. The story is to them unintelligible. They do not know what the writer would be at. They can, perhaps, see the lesson, after some fortunate one has discovered and explained it. But such an explanation should be unnecessary. An allegory with crutches is a poor affair.⁴⁶

This is a common practice among many critics; to look for something within a text, and, failing to find it, then to proceed to blame both text and author for that absence. The specific ideology of the reviewer just cited, a New England preacher, determines completely his reaction to the tale; there is a 'lesson' in the story, he feels. Yet it is in the perceived weakness, an 'obscurity of execution', that the active potential of Hawthorne's tales lies. In the brilliant essay, 'Hawthorne and His Mosses. By a Virginian Spending His Summer in Vermont', Herman Melville humorously makes the point:

'Who in the name of thunder' (as the country-people say in this neighbourhood), 'who in the name of thunder', would anticipate any marvel in a piece entitled 'Young Goodman Brown?' You would of course suppose that it was a simple little tale, intended as a supplement to 'Goody Two Shoes.' Whereas, it is as deep as Dante.⁴⁷

While Melville does go on to discuss Goodman Brown's 'allegorical pursuit of his Puritan wife', his reading allows the metaphor to increase rather than contract the text's possible meanings. To seek out a moral lesson within a text is to ignore its grounding in ideology and language; this is an assertion I shall illustrate further on in this chapter with reference to specific stories.

In the 1908 'New York Preface' to *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James famously set out his own stall, insisting upon ambiguity as the means by which a writer might hold the reader's attention and engender fear:

There is for such a case no absolute of the wrong; it remains relative to fifty other elements, a matter of appreciation, speculation, imagination—these things moreover quite exactly in the light of the spectator's, the critic's, the reader's experience. Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself—and that already is a charming job—and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.⁴⁸

James is insisting upon potentiality being privileged over a spurious 'absolute' in literary discourse. What needs to be acknowledged is the extent to which this openness to discursive potentialities does not originate with modernist—still less with postmodernist—practice. Poe praised the 'masterly composition' of 'The Minister's Black Veil' and its 'insinuated' meaning;⁴⁹ and, Longfellow, whose own poetry Poe detested, seems to be pre-empt James in appreciating Hawthorne's ambivalent mode:

One of Mr. Hawthorne's most characteristic traits is the successful manner in which he deals with the supernatural. He blends together, with a skilful hand, the two worlds of the seen and the unseen. He never fairly goes out of the limits of probability, never calls up an actual ghost, or dispenses with the laws of nature; but he passes as near as possible to the dividing line.⁵⁰

A consideration of a number of Hawthorne's stories allows a critical approach to be asserted which pays attention to both the 'pale glimpses', the ambiguous determinations, of his narrative art, and to their specific historical grounding. While the early reviews of Hawthorne display a general understanding of the ambiguous nature of his fictions, this chapter is concerned to discuss the stories in the light of more recent readings, and to suggest ways in which Hawthorne's discursive practice is part of his ironic production of American identity. In his best short stories, an idea of America and American-ness seems to be suggested, but it is then undermined, or seen through, by the specific rhetorical modes and diction of the narrative.

Firstly, however, before looking at the deconstructive and ironic mode of some of Hawthorne's stories, we must acknowledge these texts as discursive products of an age of burgeoning capitalism, and the connected bourgeois ideology of individualism. Hawthorne's narratives point to contradictions within the epoch, and use the past as a means of gaining an understanding of the immediate present. The essay 'The Old Manse' establishes a coherent attitude towards the fervent industrial and mercantile expansionism of mid-nineteenth century America:

We stand now on the river's brink. It may well be called the Concord—the river of peace and quietness—for it is certainly the most unexcitable and sluggish stream that ever loitered, imperceptibly, towards its eternity, the sea. Positively, I had lived three weeks beside it, before it grew quite clear to my perception which way the current flowed. It never has a vivacious aspect, except when a north-western breeze is vexing its surface, on a sunshiny day. From the incurable indolence of its nature, the stream is happily incapable of becoming the slave of human ingenuity, as is the fate of so many a wild, free mountain-torrent.⁵¹

The Concord is 'happily' able to resist being enslaved by humanity's imperial designs because it is 'the most unexcitable and sluggish stream that ever loitered', and this 'indolence' is 'incurable'. It is the very opposite, in other words, of the American capitalist enterprise and expansionism. The river's passivity renders it unexploitable; like Bartleby, Melville's recalcitrant scrivener, the Concord would 'prefer not to'.⁵²

An even more direct attack upon the increasingly hegemonic ideology of strenuous individualism occurs later in the essay: 'Were I to adopt a pet idea, as so many people do, and fondle it in my embraces to the exclusion of all others, it would be, that the great want which mankind labours under, at this present period, is—sleep! The world should recline its vast head on the first convenient pillow, and take an age-long nap' (*MOM*, p.29). The words 'this present period' point to the specific concern Hawthorne had for his contemporary world. There is a connection, I believe, between this desire to stop the exertions of individualism, and the language of doubt and uncertainty which invests much of Hawthorne's fictions with great indeterminacy. The connection lies within the area of social relations. Many of the stories insist upon the impossibility of removing contradictions and ambiguities, and indeed point to the ways in which strenuous effort to believe in an abstracted theory simply perpetuates and increases the contradictions dialectically.

A will-to-believe seems to engender many of the personal and social problems which the stories reproduce as detached and uncertain signification; the ambiguous language of many of Hawthorne's narratives might then be read as a way of

undermining this propensity while retaining the notion of possibilities, as opposed to universalized answers. Hawthorne's fictions ironize the will-to-believe. In their wayward and ambivalent signification they do not so much decrib the contradictions of positivist ideologies as ironically reproduce them. We can therefore recognize that Hawthorne uses language in a poetic way if we agree that poetic language elides direct reference, and that:

The sign—or more correctly the signifier—is neither a lens through which we can more or less clearly 'see' history nor is it a pointer indicating what is happening; it does not *depict* history, it is part of it. In poetry, where the sign is wrenched further away from its customary usage than in any other form of discourse, the complex articulation—the condensations, displacements and slippages—can tell us more about the historical matrix than any other theory which regards literature and poetry as mere epiphenomena of a superior historical reality.⁵³

Vernon Parrington, a twentieth-century admirer of many of the ideas and works of America's nineteenth-century transcendentalists, accurately describes a problematic aspect of that movement: 'in essence this new transcendental faith was a glorification of consciousness and will.'⁵⁴ And although Parrington has little time for Hawthorne's writing, he seems to be echoing the latter's complaint in 'The Old Manse', in which Hawthorne is particularly scathing about this inherent trait of the transcendentalist philosophy, however abstract and non-unified that 'philosophy' might be:

Uncertain, troubled, earnest wanderers, through the midnight of the moral world, beheld his intellectual fire, as a beacon burning on a hill-top, and, climbing the difficult ascent looked forth into the surrounding obscurity, more hopefully than hitherto. The light revealed objects unseen before—mountains, gleaming lakes, glimpses of a creation among the chaos—but also, as was unavoidable, it attracted bats and owls, and the whole host of night-birds, which flapped their dusky wings against the gazer's eyes, and sometimes were mistaken for fowls of angelic feather. Such delusions always hover nigh, whenever a beacon-fire of truth is kindled.

(*MOM*, p.32)

These 'earnest wanderers' remind us of Reuben Bourne in 'Roger Malvin's Burial', or Young Goodman Brown; individuals obsessively attempting to read the material world as symbolic of a transcendent truth. Reifying the world as immanent meaning,

as representing something other than itself, in search of a vision of truth. In the above passage, a dialectical opposition is established in which doubt and confusion stand in contradiction to the 'beacon-fire of truth', with its contingent emphasis upon personal will and abstracted assertions. This 'beacon' illuminates only the delusions of its worshippers; that is, their over-interpretation of the world.

In the short story 'Roger Malvin's Burial', it is precisely Reuben Bourne's over-interpretation of the material world which leads to his own son's death. Colonial New England is imagined in this story as lived ideology (Reuben's emotions and thoughts), while the tale is simultaneously left without a closed ending. The meanings engendered within the story are both historically determined *and* textually uncertain; as with many of Hawthorne's fictions, 'Roger Malvin's Burial' is 'capable of endless extensions of meaning and of stimulating repeated analysis and interpretation'.⁵⁵

The relationship between Reuben Bourne and Roger Malvin is both narrative impulse and metaphorical emblem for the advance of property-owning individualism in colonial North America. Malvin, wounded and dying after action in a frontier war of 1725, beseeches Reuben to abandon him in the forest and save himself. Critics have looked at the question of Reuben's motivation for acceding to this wish in some detail and it is worth considering this aspect of the story as it exemplifies some of the ways in which Hawthorne treats history and textuality. When the wounded Roger asks Reuben to continue without him, Reuben insists upon staying with Roger until the latter has recovered. Roger, however, rebuts Reuben:

'Let the wish of a dying man have weight with you; give me one grasp of your hand, and get you hence. Think you that my last moments will be eased by the thought, that I leave you to die a more lingering death? I have loved you like a father, Reuben, and at a time like this, I should have something of a father's authority. I charge you to be gone, that I may die in peace.'

(*MOM*, p.339)

After much debate, Reuben agrees to leave; however, the seemingly obvious motivation of respect for the older man's wishes is ironically displaced in the text, and Reuben's unstated motivations emerge indistinctly and indirectly. The 'father's authority' is superseded by Reuben's unstated motives. Roger recounts for Reuben an episode in his past when he had similarly had to leave an injured comrade in order to seek help and return to the wounded man:

'I came upon the camp of a hunting party, before sunset of the same day. I guided them to the spot where my comrade was expecting death; and he is now a hale and hearty man, upon his own farm, far within the frontiers, while I lie wounded here, in the depths of the wilderness.'

This example, powerful in effecting Reuben's decision, was aided, unconsciously to himself, by the hidden strength of many another motive. Roger Malvin perceived that the victory was nearly won.

(*MOM*, p.343)

The 'wilderness' which Roger and Reuben inhabit is both an actual and a figurative one: the unconscious and hidden strength of many another motive is what creates the story's tensions.

When Reuben is reunited with his prospective wife, Roger's daughter Dorcas, he says nothing to her of his promise to return to Roger with help, and it is with a mixed sense of culpability and self-preservation that Reuben 'between shame and exhaustion, sank back and hid his face in the pillow' (*MOM*, p.343). His subsequent lies and obfuscation make Reuben doubly ashamed, yet his actions cannot be explained outwith the social context of the story's setting; they have a wider social and historical import beyond individual psychology.

Property, as both symbol and object of desire, is manifestly significant in this story. All of Reuben's prevarication over the correct course of action in the forest, and his subsequent suffering under the 'miserable and humiliating torture of unmerited praise' (*MOM*, p.348), have to be read in the context of what Reuben stood to gain from Roger's death:

In the course of a few years after their marriage, changes began to be visible in the external property of Reuben and Dorcas. The only riches of the former had been his stout heart and strong arm; but the latter, her father's sole heiress, had made her husband master of a farm, under older cultivation, larger, and better stocked than most of the frontier establishments.

(*MOM*, p.350)

Reading this account of Reuben's inheritance alongside a historian's conclusions about the second and third generation of New England European immigrants, strengthens the sense that Hawthorne's critique is firstly socio-economic, not 'moral', psychological or spiritual:

They chose to live in America, not as members of a close-knit community of piety, but as individualist farmers, each seeking his and his family's salvation, economically and spiritually, on his own. Had they cared to they could have argued that they were the truest Puritans, individual salvation being the central value of Puritanism; no wonder that, in propitious circumstances (and the frontier settlement in North America was very propitious), the value was followed to its logical, 'he travels faster who travels alone' conclusion.⁵⁶

What both of the above texts point to is a social system of increasing individualism becoming established in North America. Indeed, as the narrative of 'Roger Malvin's Burial' progresses, Reuben's self-consciousness becomes increasingly obsessive and it is this self-absorption which leads to his willed over-interpretation of natural objects. To a great extent, Reuben *demand*s that the forest offer up to him a sign expressive of his guilty conscience. The Calvinist conviction that the physical world is redolent with spiritual signification, to the extent that the visible and material world becomes merely a medium for God's will to be expressed in figurative symbolism, is of course a crucial aspect of Reuben's psyche. Indeed that ideological construct is so powerful, that a modern reader such as Susan Manning can build a convincing argument for its almost overwhelming determinative role in both American and Scottish literature of the nineteenth-century.

Alongside this Calvinist doctrine, the tension mediated through the narrative is between individual gain and inherited custom. It is the contradictory messages

received by the reader from the narrative which invest the story with multiple potentialities, and we are drawn into choosing between kinds of significance and then reconsidering our choices. For example, Reuben's failure to bury Roger is considered in the light of the practice of the time:

An almost superstitious regard, arising perhaps from the customs of the Indians, whose war was with the dead, as well as the living, was paid by the frontier inhabitants to the rites of sepulture; and there are many instances of the sacrifices of life in the attempt to bury those who had fallen by the 'sword of the wilderness'. Reuben, therefore, felt the full importance of the promise, which he most solemnly made, to return, and perform Roger Malvin's obsequies.

(*MOM*, p.344)

What is dismissed as 'almost superstition' is in fact a motivating force as strong as any other, and by the end of the story we perceive that indeed Reuben has been warring with the dead, or at least with an abstract and non-concrete belief, and sacrifices his son in that war; ideology has been made manifest and concrete in action.

Reuben's fear regarding the unburied body is ultimately justified in that tragedy does result, therefore the 'superstition' is, in its own way, proved true; alternatively, a naturalistic reading of the tale, for which there is ample internal material, might emphasize the distraught state of Reuben's mind and read the ensuing events as the product of that. Jeremy Hawthorn's observations regarding the difference between the novel and the epic or saga could as well be applied to the short story generally, and to Hawthorne's fictions specifically:

The far greater internal complexity of the individual character presented in the novel is related to the fact that the society from which the novel emerges consists of human beings who compete not only with nature but also with one another.⁵⁷

Indeed it seems to me imperative, in reading 'Roger Malvin's Burial', to consider the determining aspects of specific social and cultural pressures as they are brought to bear upon Reuben himself. His guilt at abandoning Roger, a guilt subsequently

compounded by Reuben's lies about the events and the fact that he leaves Roger's corpse unburied, is felt as sin by Reuben, not as mere wrongdoing; this theological interpretation of his own actions leads him to conceal them from others for fear of being socially as well as spiritually outcast. It is the social form of the family unit which lends a distinctive edge to this story, as Reuben's guilt is transferred onto his wife and son. One modern critic has identified the family as the determining cause of the story's, and Reuben's, tensions and contradictions: 'Reuben seems unable to distinguish between expiation and revenge because within a family they are indistinguishable'.⁵⁸ Reuben's identity on this reading is a product of the variegated forces of his own theological beliefs and the social fact of the family.

However, while both the family unit and Puritan ideology certainly function as determinants of both identity and narrative, they seem to be subsumed within the material facts of burgeoning individualism, which is ironically interpellated by the narrating voice. It is in the interstices between an allegorical reading of the colonial world and the socio-economic forces shaping that world that the 'burial' of Roger Malvin receives full metaphoric weight. One implication of this text is that what *can not* be buried is precisely the ideological pressures which create Reuben's identity and determine, complexly, his actions.

My emphasis upon the need to respond both to the historical determinations and textual dialectics of 'Roger Malvin's Burial' might be contrasted with the approach adopted by the prominent Hawthorne scholar, Agnes McNeill Donohue. In her book *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild*, Donohue says:

[Reuben] fails his father, as, in a sense, every human being wounded by Original Sin fails his God. Reuben hopes he will be able to expiate his sin by burying Roger's bones, but the necessary propitiation is far greater than this. A complete sacrifice is required by the flouted parental authority—the Puritan vengeful God. In a sense Reuben's disobedience to Roger is a re-enactment of the Fall, Original Sin, with its Calvinist overtones of damnation.

In many ways Reuben is Everyman—every human being who fails his father; he obeys first and yet fails. Still Reuben denies between the rocks and is unable to tell the truth to Dorcas, who blithely assumes the

heroism that he could not perform yet cannot deny. Reuben is the non-heroic man undermined by the poison of humanity, which keeps him a human being and not a god.⁵⁹

Even the conditional phrases—‘in a sense’, ‘in many ways’—do not conceal the monologic thrust of this interpretation. Donohue reduces ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial’ almost to the level of theological tract; the paradoxical fact that the story’s narrative possibilities are opened out by its material contingencies, is ignored and a theocentric interpretative strategy adopted. The story can then be mediated by the critic as a translation—however ‘ironic’—of biblical and Calvinist authority.

Such an exclusive reading of the story, which sees it as exemplifying allegorical modes of writing and moralistic strains in Hawthorne’s consciousness, completely fails to identify the exposure of specific traits and contradictions of Puritan ideology in Hawthorne’s writing, as opposed to the propagation of that ideology. It is possible to incorporate Hawthorne’s intellectual and emotional links with New England Puritanism into a reading responsive to both textual multivocality and historical determinants without producing readings which are either over-reductive—such as Donohue’s—or abstract. J. Hillis Miller’s assertion that ‘the specific heterogeneity of a given text can be exactly defined, even though a univocal meaning cannot be justified by the text.’⁶⁰ seems to me apposite when we consider the ambiguities and ironies of Hawthorneian discourse. Miller’s clarification of the link between textual materiality and interpretive dialectics can help us avoid over-abstracted readings of Hawthorne’s ‘ambiguities’, and the drift into meaningless conjecture:

The various meanings are not the free imposition of subjective interpretations by the reader, but are controlled by the text. In that sense they are determinate. The novel provides the textual material for identifying exactly what the possible explanations are. The reader is not permitted to go outside the text to make up other possible explanations of his own. The indeterminacy lies in the multiplicity of possible incompatible explanations given by the novel and in the lack of evidence justifying a choice of one over the others.⁶¹

The 'possible incompatible explanations' of Hawthorne's story locate it beyond a simple ideological formulation as either 'puritan' or even 'anti-puritan'. Indeed, the Calvinism which Agnes Donohue places at the centre of her interpretative strategy, to the seeming exclusion of just about all others, has itself been subjected to rigorous analysis in terms of its function within Hawthorne's fictions.

Identifying Calvinism as the privileged determinant of Hawthorne's writing, Donohue claims:

Hawthorne's repressed Calvinism ordained the profound irony that forced him into ambiguity, conditioned his aesthetic distance and his authorial voice, ordained the alternate choice of endings or interpretations, spawned the rich imagery and symbolism, and dictated the complex structure of his novels and tales⁶²

While we note the acknowledgment of 'ambiguity', 'irony', and 'the alternate choice of endings' in Donohue's assessment, they seem to be acknowledged mainly in order to emphasise the overpowering determinism of Calvinist theology as it acts upon Hawthorne's writing practice. In Donohue's assessment, it is not the qualities imputed to Hawthorne's writing which are most striking, rather it is the choice of verbs used to demonstrate the ineluctability of 'Hawthorne's repressed Calvinism': Hawthorne's writing is 'ordained', 'conditioned', 'ordained' (again!), 'spawned' and 'dictated' by Calvinism. It is as if a form of Calvinist determinism has been replicated as monologic and inviolable literary determinism. Reading *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild*, it is not immediately apparent that Donohue sees the irony of her own univocal approach.

This emphasis upon the author's personal psychology, and its formation by a specific theological doctrine, is in direct contradiction to Henry James's feeling that Hawthorne's deployment of Calvinism in his narratives is a matter of aesthetics, not morality or theology:

Nothing is more curious and interesting than this almost imported character of the sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind; it seems to exist there

merely for an artistic or literary purpose. He had ample cognizance of the Puritan conscience; it was his natural heritage; it was reproduced in him; looking into his soul, he found it lying there. But his relation to it was only, as one may say, intellectual; it was not moral and theological.⁶³

Hawthorne's representation of religious forms of thought and social institutions is here argued to be purely aesthetic and intellectual. Emphasizing its reproductivity, James conceives of Calvinism—for Hawthorne, anyway—as a rhetorical trope; stripped of its specific theological and 'moral' elements, it becomes a way of telling, a narrative paradigm.

What I find surprising about these two possible readings of Hawthorne—Donohue's 'ordained' irony, and James's 'artistic or literary purpose'—is not their methodological difference (either Calvinism dictates Hawthorne's art whether he wishes it to do so or not, or he consciously uses it for solely literary purposes), but that Donohue's reductive, neutralizing interpretation was written in 1985, one hundred and six years later than James's account of the 'curious' nature of Hawthorne's writing. Like the Connecticut pastor reviewing 'Young Goodman Brown' in 1847,⁶⁴ Donohue effectively excludes alterior readings, because she has located Hawthorne's 'ironic' Calvinism, which, she believes, fully explains his writing. Whereas, Hawthorne's best fictions actually deconstruct, through irony, 'the critic's own interpretive ploys to unify the text.'⁶⁵

In 'Our Hawthorne', the aptly titled afterword to *Hawthorne Centenary Essays* (1964), Lionel Trilling considers the different receptions afforded Hawthorne in different periods. Indeed Henry James's book, *Hawthorne* (1879), provides Trilling with much of his subject-matter. 'Our' Hawthorne, notes Trilling, is 'multi-levelled', 'ironic', contradictory and fretful, in contrast to James's Hawthorne who is playful, light and an aesthete: 'James is unequivocal and emphatic in his belief that Hawthorne's interest in Puritanism was nothing but artistic', an assessment which Trilling finds a little embarrassing coming from the great modernist James.⁶⁶

Trilling is right to point out that readers bring 'meanings' to a text; that, effectively, 'our' modernist Hawthorne is different from James's aesthetic artist. If we are to understand the various formulations of identity as suggested in Hawthorne's writings, we have to recognize that there is no universal, essential meaning within the text; only possible meanings which the text deploys discursively. Trilling might seem an unusual critic to cite as a potential ally of a historical or Marxist reading of American literary formulations of identity, yet his notion of 'our' Hawthorne is predicated on similar presumptions—regarding textual materiality and the ideologies of both reading and writing—as, for example, those made by Tony Bennett in his argument for a rapprochement between Marxist and deconstructive practice. Although he might not have appreciated Bennett's critical language, Trilling might have agreed with the sentiment of the following claim:

The actual and variable functioning of texts in history can only be understood if account is taken of the ways in which such originary relations may be modified through the operation of subsequent determinations—institutional and discursive—which may retrospectively cancel out, modify or overdetermine those which marked the originating conditions of a text's production.⁶⁷

Yet, in many ways Henry James's book—'his' Hawthorne—is not so naive and straightforward as Trilling makes out. Indeed, the claim that James's reading of Hawthorne 'was controlled by a cultural assumption', that of 'the ideology of Philistinism which always hovered over even the best thought of the Victorian era'⁶⁸ seems to me an example of the blindness of one ideology—in this case, the American New Criticism and its 'cultural assumptions'—to its own conditions of being. The origins of 'our'—that is, Trilling's—Hawthorne appear to the critic to be in the vigour and intellectual sophistication of his own age; however, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, Longfellow, Melville and Poe all read and savoured the ambiguities and contradictions in Hawthorne's best writing. In the first half of the nineteenth-century these writers had already observed that 'in the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*.'⁶⁹

Without detailing James's assessment of Hawthorne's work too extensively, it is worth considering a few passages from the book to underline the point that attention to textual multiplicities, evasions and ambiguities is by no means a modernist, and still less a postmodernist, initiative. Hawthorne's complex articulations of individual and communal identity are predicated upon the ambivalent nature of symbols and signification; it is in the ideological gap between signifying practice (writing), and interpretation (reading), that Hawthorne's texts seem to locate the formulation of identity. Discourse, in itself always and necessarily ideological, is a dynamic process, not a static presentation of reality. That many of Hawthorne's stories evade the imposition of fixed meanings was not lost on Hawthorne himself:

I am very glad that the 'Mosses' have come into the hands of our firm; and I return the copy sent me, after a careful revision. When I wrote those dreamy sketches, I little thought that I should ever prepare an edition for the press amidst the bustling life of a Liverpool consul. Upon my honor, I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories; but I remember that I always had a meaning—or, at least, thought I had. I am a good deal changed since those times; and to tell you the truth, my past self is not very much to my taste, as I see myself in this book.⁷⁰

Unsure of his own 'meaning', Hawthorne admits only that he 'thought' he had one, not that he knew for sure; the language of the tales is so far beyond the merely referential that their author is unable himself to provide a simple interpretation. Remarking on 'my past self', Hawthorne indicates that identity is not essential and universal, but relative and changing.

In *Hawthorne*, Henry James wrote, also regarding *Mosses from an Old Manse*, that 'the valuable element in these things was not what Hawthorne put into them consciously, but what passed into them without his being able to measure it.'⁷¹ Identifying the strong historicizing impetus in Hawthorne's writing, James writes of Hawthorne's conception of romance: 'realities are kept in view sufficiently to make us feel that if we are reading romance, it is romance that rather supplements than contradicts history.'⁷²

This connecting of history with the agency of narrative fiction is pressed further by James:

Hawthorne had, as regards the two earlier centuries of New England life, that faculty which is called now-a-days the historic consciousness. He never sought to exhibit it on a large scale; he exhibited it indeed on a scale so minute that we must not linger too much upon it. His vision of the past was filled with definite images.⁷³

This insistence upon Hawthorne's historical approach recognizes that historicism and what James refers to as 'shadowy' things are not incompatible elements of textuality, but mutually supportive. James himself is dealing in contradiction and ambiguity, his writing matching that of his subject, whose writing James judges as evading closed interpretation:

It is not too much to say, even, that the very condition of production of some of these unamiable tales would be that they should be superficial, and as it were, insincere. The magnificent little romance of 'Young Goodman Brown', for instance, evidently means nothing as regards Hawthorne's own state of mind, his conviction of human depravity and his consequent melancholy; for the simple reason that if it meant anything it would mean too much.⁷⁴

Tony Tanner's reading of James's reading of Hawthorne—which Tanner suggests can be read as a self-reflexive statement of James's perception of *his own* self-exile as an American writer in Europe—concludes that 'whenever James thinks of Hawthorne he sees him as a man with a sense of darkness in a country of too much light.'⁷⁵ Indeed, Tanner's assessment of a later essay by James highlights the point, arguing that 'instead of calling Hawthorne an outsider in Europe, [James] now treats him as the universal alienated writer'.⁷⁶ Which we can now note is strikingly similar to Trilling's—admittedly overstated—comment: 'everyone perceives certain likenesses between Hawthorne and Kafka [...] there is a very considerable degree of similarity in their preoccupations'.⁷⁷ So the doubt, ambivalence and sense of absence which Trilling notes as a quality of 'our' Hawthorne is actually present in James's *Hawthorne* too.

The story 'Young Goodman Brown' exemplifies the extent to which Hawthorne's narrative strategies revolve around the potentialities of discourse, and simultaneously ground themselves in a specific historical situation. In this story, we see how, at its best, Hawthorne's writing is 'the fiction of a culture ever in conflict—between romance and realism, past and present, symbol and plain fact, [...] the solitary workings of imagination and the functioning of community, history seen as process and progress and history seen as myth.'⁷⁸

Susan Manning argues that: 'the powerful hold which "Young Goodman Brown" holds over the reader's imagination resides rather in the mode of telling than in any substantial "wisdom" it is able to impart about sin [...but] there is, as always in Hawthorne, a precise historical base.'⁷⁹ And the ironic 'mode of telling' in 'Young Goodman Brown' is activated not only in its articulation of the contradictions which permeate the young, third-generation American puritan's struggle to locate an identity of his own, haunted by the direct and familial past. The text ironizes not only Brown's perspective, but the reader's also. The well-known opening lines invite a Bunyanesque allegorical reading:

Young Goodman Brown came forth, at sunset, into the street of Salem village, but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap, while she called to Goodman Brown.

(*MOM*, p.74)

The allegorical signposting could not be more obvious; 'as the wife was aptly named' suggests a direct and unproblematical correspondence between sign and object. However, the faith which the reader might invest in names and described events is swiftly undermined as Goodman Brown's journey along the 'dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest' is transformed from a puritan morality tale into a web of contradictory messages regarding the nature of sexuality, language, writing and interpretation.

Far from being 'the central ambiguity' of the story, as one critic has claimed,⁸⁰ the question of whether 'the events of the night were actual or a dream' can usefully be read as a deliberately misleading choice of alternatives. The fact that the narrator directly poses the question, 'Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?', seems to me to suggest that we need to look beyond the 'ambiguity' of this 'event' and instead focus attention on the almost endless profusion of conditional clauses in the text. Ideological determinations of thought, action and language are articulated throughout the story, and Goodman Brown's 'dream'—or, alternatively, his bearing witness—is a direct function of that determinative power. Subverting the story which Puritan New England told itself—that America was a new holy land, that they would 'civilize' the barbaric natives—'Young Goodman Brown' puts no other in its place.

The text is awash with statements which are heavily qualified and subsequently multivalent. Conditional phrases and words—'as if', 'perhaps', 'may be'—are recurrent, and the reader is, as it were, reading two or more stories at the same time: the story which Goodman Brown believes he is living, and the story suggested by the ambiguous tone of the narrating voice, a story in which language as self-contained and self-reflexive discourse erases the possibility of language as direct, empirical reference. Utterances are particularly accorded a high degree of uncertainty in this tale, and the heavily ironic conversational tones of the ostensible 'devil' of the story are but the most obvious example of this:

'Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you, for their sake.'

(*MOM*, p.77)

The basis of friendship is here a shared capacity for murder and violence, such that the genteel, respectable phrase, 'many a pleasant walk', is not so much ironic as sarcastic

In contrast to this straightforward use of paradox, the potential unintelligibility of language is posited as an indication of the horror of isolation and lack of community. It is as if Hawthorne's text is desperately trying to fill what Malcolm Bradbury calls 'the unwritten space of the wilderness',⁸¹ with writing. It is worth remarking that it is specifically the spoken voice which generates confusion in this narrative. Goodman Brown is often confused by the voices he hears, or thinks he hears, and the dangers of misinterpretation are implied in the story as a whole. Often the prose is redolent with powerful negatives and suggestive absences:

Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once, the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of town's-people of his own [...]. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine, at Salem village, but never, until now, from a cloud of night [...].

He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance, with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness, pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out; and his cry was lost to his own ear, by its unison with the cry of the desert.

(*MOM*, p.82, p.84)

A superb example of the degree to which Hawthorne's best writing invites allegorical interpretations, or at least moral ones, only to undermine such readings by multiplicity, elision and dark hints of narrative, comes when Brown is in the forest: 'Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends' (*MOM*, p.85).



‘Young Goodman Brown’ is concerned with repression, and this is where historical specificity is brought into contact with linguistic overdetermination. Like Reuben Bourne, Goodman Brown is concealing and repressing, but Brown’s repression is a denial of self, and in particular of his sexuality. The Calvinist doctrine of the spiritual degeneracy of all mankind, save for the few Elect, is made concrete for Goodman Brown through the agency of his own imagination and social position. The concept of ‘sin’ in this story is specifically related to carnal experience, and it is this experience which Goodman Brown fears and runs from, consequently isolating himself from the community. This fictional, yet historical, account of Puritan New England society is a refraction of the nineteenth-century in which Hawthorne lived; as historical precedent and cause, Goodman Brown’s world is expressed in Hawthorne’s. Brown, alienated from his own sensuality, seems to exemplify the contention that ‘simple, open American society [in Hawthorne’s writing] does not so much reflect a purity of character as block powerful inclinations from expression, so that they turn in upon themselves to fester.’⁸²

Just as the vocal utterances in the narrative are muffled, confused and threatening, so the visual evidence garnered by Brown is dim and unsure:

The road grew wilder and drearer, and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness [...].

As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

‘A grave and dark-clad company!’ quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth, they were such. Among them, quivering to-and-fro, between gloom and splendor, appeared faces.

(*MOM*, p.83, p.84)

The words ‘gloom and splendor’ are doubly significant in the context of Goodman Brown’s self-repression because it is ‘gloom’ which he seeks and the open ‘splendor’ of human activity which he fears and loathes. On the opening page of the story, Goodman Brown denies the emotional and sexual intimacy sought by Faith: “Dearest heart,” whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, “pr’y thee, put off your journey until sunrise, and sleep in your own bed to-

night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she's afraid of herself, sometimes'" (*MOM*, p.74).

In the forest, Goodman Brown's denial of his physicality manifests itself as a fear of all community and he is figured as an outcast in 'the shadow of the trees', divorced from a common, even democratic, human intercourse where 'the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered, also, among their pale-faced enemies, were the Indian priests, or powows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft' (*MOM*, p.85).

When he returns to the town in the morning, Goodman Brown's isolation becomes self-fulfilling as he rejects those by whom he feels rejected:

Often, awakening suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away.

(*MOM*, p.89)

The tale closes on this note of repression, exclusion and isolation, and it is to these concerns that the language of the text is directed. And the narrator's off-handed question as to whether Goodman Brown had experienced or merely dreamt the witch-meeting suggests an unmediated gap between discourse and event; through ironic self-reflection, the text denies a uniform explanation to the reader. What *is* suggested is the determination of individual 'identity', and consciousness, by social forces; social forces which are themselves the material products, and symbols, of ideological formations.

The discursive opacity of the story suggests the ultimate failure, the emptiness, of the subjective act of interpretation. As one critic succinctly writes, "'Young Goodman Brown", with its insistence on its own "as-ifness", is a rather special sort of tale, peculiarly about itself, about the nature of belief in imagined realities, and about the status of such realities.'⁸³

The narrative mode and language of 'Young Goodman Brown' suggest profound differences between Hawthorne and the American Transcendentalists, most particularly Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's belief in regenerate man, in the capacity of the individual to exert influence and control through sheer will-power is the antithesis of Hawthorne's doubt and purposeful contradiction. Indeed, the Transcendentalists viewed fiction as an outmoded form, as did Thomas Carlyle in Britain.⁸⁴ Whereas Hawthorne's narratives are steeped in the specific history of his country, Emerson wrote, in his *Journals*: 'We must never reason from history, but plant ourselves on the ideal.'⁸⁵ Hawthorne was to mock mercilessly this kind of metaphysical rhetoric in 'The Celestial Rail-road' (1843); this is a parodic, updated and industrialized version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The corruscating tone of Hawthorne's attack upon the naturalising vagaries of Emersonian philosophy cannot be paraphrased:

Into their deserted cave another terrible giant has thrust himself, and makes it his business to seize upon honest travellers, and fat them for his table with plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes, and saw-dust. He is a German by birth, and is called Giant Transcendentalist; but as to his form, his features, his substance, and his nature generally, it is the chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant, that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them. As we rushed by the cavern's mouth, we caught a hasty glimpse of him, looking somewhat like an ill-proportioned figure, but considerably more like a heap of fog and duskiess. He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted.

(*MOM*, p.197)

The thrust of Hawthorne's passage is that, quite simply, the Transcendentalists are insubstantial, they have no form. For Hawthorne, the modes in which the Transcendentalists wrote and spoke, the language they employed, were ahistorical, unconnected to life as experienced in his time: 'He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted'.

In Hawthorne's writing, language always has a sense of connectedness; it is not prophetic, it relies on common currency, folk-lore, and social forms, whereas Emerson's is mythical, individualistic, attempting to escape from the history inherent within language. Both writers are concerned with America's attempt to divorce itself, and hence its cultural forms, from Europe, and to that extent Emerson's call for a language reflecting the supposed innocence of America is significant. In *Literary Democracy*, Larzer Ziff gives an excellent reading of Emerson's insistence upon the Americanization of language, an Americanization which, Emerson argues, can be achieved by paying particular attention to 'the *land* as an increasing power [...] the sanative and Americanizing influence.'⁸⁶ Emerson's wish to weld land and language becomes a paradigmatic exercise in American linguistic debate; the land, especially the vastness and wilderness of the North American continent, become literary and metaphorical tropes. For example, in the poetry and theory of Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams's idea of an 'American grain', American topography is a controlling metaphor—these two examples are looked at in great detail as they relate to Edgar Allan Poe's critique of American literary dependency, in chapter four of this thesis. It is, however, worth quoting Larzer Ziff here, when he writes of 'literature as a unique and intense social form [and] the process by which the details of the world—especially its cultural anxieties—worked their way into the form and texture of literature', this troping of the American landscape stands as an excellent vindication of his argument.⁸⁷

In the context of Emerson's nationalism, the reference in 'The Celestial Rail-road' to the German origins of Transcendentalism is doubly ironic; Emerson may have attacked American fiction as a European derivative, and Walt Whitman had demanded that 'great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances [...] as soon as histories are properly told there is no more need for romances',⁸⁸ but the culture which furnished Emerson's own literary and philosophical theories was itself European and dominant.

It is not surprising, considering the emphasis placed by Hawthorne upon community and upon language as a particularly human construct that he should disagree so

strongly with the Emersonian philosophy, even if 'it is the chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant, that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them'. Identity may be a difficult concept, and literature as a social product necessarily informs national identity, yet, Hawthorne seems to be arguing, we can not run away from it into vagaries and abstraction. Where the Transcendentalists are insubstantial, Hawthorne is ambiguous but concrete. The nature of this ambiguity is of crucial importance to any evaluation of both the multiple textuality and the historical determinants of Hawthorne's writing.

The terms 'romances' and 'tales' which Hawthorne used to describe his work, as opposed to novels or stories, provide a clue of sorts to the specific attributes of the writing. By insisting upon the unreality of his fictions, Hawthorne paradoxically demystifies them. 'The Haunted Mind' (1834) deals specifically with the duality of the imagination, with its distance from actuality and its contradictory hold over human experience; the tales and romances mediate this dialectic in diverse ways. In 'The Haunted Mind', the reader is made aware of the nature of Hawthorne's romances because in this piece the dialogue between concrete reality and subjective interpretation is made clear and paramount:

In the depths of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at midnight, those dark receptacles are flung wide open. In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them; then pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain. It is too late!⁸⁹

In his study of the interconnections between Scottish Common Sense thought and American fiction, Terence Martin reads 'The Haunted Mind' as a text seen in opposition to Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Stressing the dialectical relationship between perception and reality—a dialectic articulated and problematized in Hawthorne's writing—Martin argues that 'Common Sense' Scots such as James Beattie rejected this relationship as threateningly irrational and

countered it with 'a metaphysic that preferred actuality and denigrated possibility.'⁹⁰ The subversive powerlessness of Hawthorne's 'haunted mind' contrasts with Beattie's determination to 'get at the facts of perception so that the actual world is re-established around him';⁹¹ Hawthorne's world is textually complex, Beattie's reductively simple.

The influence of the Scottish Common Sense school of thought upon American thought is now generally acknowledged, as the mixture of educational, religious and economic ideologies incorporated within the Common Sense school were peculiarly suited to New England's ideological inheritance of observation and interpretation, while also offering a bulwark against the social revolution which might arise from too great a degree of scepticism and too much imaginative literature. One cultural critic has commented that: 'for a majority of educated Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century, "philosophy" meant "Scottish philosophy" and little else'.⁹²

In this chapter I have tried to identify those aspects of Hawthorne's writing in which the indirectness of literary language and the multiple determinants of historical process reproduce as a problematic the formulation of identity, whether individual or collective. Hawthorne's deliberately ambiguous fictions seem to work not to obscure reality, but to highlight the productive and generative capacity of discourse. And I would, in any case, agree with Hyatt H. Waggoner's assertion that 'what the "right" interpretation is cannot be settled for Hawthorne's work.'⁹³

If any one piece of Hawthorne's writing mediates a synthesis of what James termed Hawthorne's 'historic consciousness'⁹⁴ and what J. Hillis Miller comprehensively refers to as literature's 'resistance to a single definitive meaning',⁹⁵ it is 'The Custom-House', introductory to *The Scarlet Letter*. In this preface, autobiography is reworked as commentary upon the concrete reality of personal and national history, and as an extended consideration upon the reading of signs, the instability of signification.

The often violent and repressive facts of the past—and of the history of Hawthorne's family—are challenged by the presence of the text of 'The Custom-House'. And

while agreeing with Henry James's contention that Hawthorne understood the Puritan ideology and its specific formations—that 'Hawthorne was at home in the early New England history; he had thumbed its records and he had breathed its air'⁹⁶—I equally believe that 'The Custom-House' is a discursive attempt to escape that 'home'.

In 'The Custom-House', we read:

Though invariably happiest elsewhere, there is within me a feeling for old Salem, which, in lack of a better phrase, I must be content to call affection. The sentiment is probably assignable to the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement, which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their earthy substance with the soil; until no small portion of it must necessarily be akin to the mortal frame wherewith, for a little while, I walk the streets.⁹⁷

The sense of a personal connection to the history of the town could not be more strongly stated, and yet this 'affection' soon changes shape and becomes responsibility. The responsibility is that borne by the individual, who after all only lives 'for a little while', for the deeds and misdeeds of ancestors. The 'original Briton' mentioned above is further described as:

A soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor; as witness the Quakers, who have remembered him in their histories, and relate an incident of his hard severity towards a woman of their sect, which will last longer, it is to be feared, than any record of his better deeds, although these were many.

(*SL*, p.9)

History is the enemy of forgetting. Responsibility for the violence of his ancestor is assumed by Hawthorne here, and it is worth remembering the reference in 'Young Goodman Brown' to Goodman Brown's cruel progenitors. The language of 'The

Custom-House' becomes increasingly infused with a sense of shame, and there is unmediated disgust in some passages:

His son, too, inherited the persecuting spirit, and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. So deep a stain, indeed, that his old dry bones, in the Charter Street burial-ground must still retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust.

(SL, p.9)

The narrator has taken on the mantle of historian, recounting the persecution, by his own familial ancestors, of those he terms 'martyrs'; so, far from being forgotten, the past is invoked as a measure of the individual's present position. This is made clear in the following confessional lines:

I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes and pray that any curse incurred by them—as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist—may be now and henceforth removed.

(SL, p.10)

I want to pay particular attention to these words as measures of the discursive strategy of 'The Custom-House' in particular; but also of the rhetorical irony in *The Scarlet Letter* 'proper', and in Hawthorne's writing generally. In the last cited passage, language is evoked not as a mediation of memory, but of forgetting; not as a path towards revelation, but to greater and deeper concealment. Understood directly, these words enact the sublimation of historical record in personal penance. Evoked 'nearly two centuries and a quarter' after Hawthorne's first ancestor landed in New England, the 'shame' is ironic; not in the sense of being falsely felt by the author, but in the more real sense of it being an essentially meaningless gesture, 'mere sensuous sympathy of dust for dust'. That is to say, Hawthorne's written 'shame' for his family's past conduct functions as a rhetorical device, because it admits to having no material function. Yet as a rhetorical device it continues to interest the contemporary reader—perhaps as family and national history interested

Hawthorne—for reasons which may have something to do with John Carlos Rowe's assertion:

What should interest us about a literary text or historical event (itself a text of sorts) is not what has already been appropriated by the rhetoric and values of the present culture but what continues to agitate us or still threatens us with its own outwandering and eccentric character.⁹⁸

We ought not to underestimate the importance of rhetoric in the structures of Hawthorne's writing. The sense of an audience being out there, reading the words he has written, is of paramount concern to his writing practice and to the particular texts which come from that practice. 'Thoughts are frozen and utterance benumbed, unless the speaker stands in some true relation with his audience' (*SL*, p.4), indicates the importance of the relationship between author and reader, and of course that relationship is mediated purely by textual means.

In 'The Custom-House' Hawthorne makes clear his awareness of the dialectical processes of signification, literary or otherwise; and he does so in a brilliantly concrete way, by focusing the reader's attention upon a mysterious piece of cloth which he unearths in the custom-house. The 'scarlet letter' 'A' which is to feature as the central symbol of the ensuing narrative is initially recovered by the narrator-author from a chaotic heap: 'At one end of the room, in a recess, were a number of barrels, piled one upon another, containing bundles of official documents. Large quantities of similar rubbish lay lumbering the floor' (*SL*, p.28). The narrative device of discovering a tale by accident is here used to emphasize the importance of signification, because amid this 'rubbish' is discovered an enigma:

A certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded [...] wrought, as was easy to perceive, with wonderful skill of needlework; and the stitch (as I am assured by ladies conversant with such mysteries) gives evidence of a now forgotten art, not to be recovered even by the process of picking out the threads. This rag of scarlet cloth,—for time, and wear, and a sacrilegious moth, had reduced it to little other than a rag,—on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital A. By an accurate measurement, each limb proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length. It had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an

ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which (so evanescent are the fashions of the world in these particulars) I saw little hope of solving. And yet it strangely interested me. My eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside. Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.

(*SL*, p.31)

The 'mysteries' of stitching suggest, in the context of 'The Custom-House' and *The Scarlet Letter* generally, the impossibility of recovering history itself, however we attempt to pick out the threads. History is always mediated and dissolved in signs, it always arrives as discourse. The question of what the actual use of the cloth letter A might have been is treated as a matter for awed confusion by the narrator. The dominant register of the above-quoted paragraph is doubt, and a sense of the ultimate impossibility of understanding signification: 'a riddle', 'little hope of solving', 'strangely interested me', 'some deep meaning', 'mystic symbol', 'subtly communicating', 'evading the analysis of my mind'.

The hiatus between signification and interpretation, is made the very subject of the text. The narrator's efforts to read the scarlet letter being as futile as the reader's efforts to reach a full interpretation of the novel, ironing out inconsistencies and settling on unitary determinations. The Puritan obsession with the distance obtaining between the material world and its spiritual meanings, a tendency to read the world as a text indicating God's will, is given modernity by Hawthorne, it is historicized. Susan Manning reads *The Scarlet Letter* as 'an imaginative evocation of possibilities rather than an imposed interpretation; responsibility for the act of elucidation which will release the image finally rests with the reader'.⁹⁹ In 'The Custom-House', this 'evocation of possibilities is set in train, and in it Hawthorne defines the conditions of his own art: 'if a man, sitting all alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try to write romances'(p36).

In Hawthorne's 'strange' dreams, his literary texts, the question of identity is writ large as a discursive problem. Because the past is unattainable except *through* discourse, Hawthorne's best writing seems to offer a hold, however tentative, on the operation of ideology in the formulation of rhetorical modes. Drawing upon past and contemporary social realities for material contexts, while simultaneously inscribing the problem of interpretation into the very narrative, Hawthorne's stories offer the reader what Henry James terms 'operative irony. It implies and projects the possible other case.'¹⁰⁰ But, this alterity is not a matter of autonomous aesthetics, or even simple riddle-playing; it is a recognition and a textual embodiment of the dialectical nature of interpretation, of the mutability of identity. It is worth recalling Hyatt Waggoner's point: "'the ambiguity device" discussed by Matthiessen years ago [...] is no mere "device" but an expression in technical terms of the essential condition of Hawthorne's belief.'¹⁰¹

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, People's Library edition (London, 1914), p.10.
2. Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, pp.10-11.
3. Washington Irving, *Tour In Scotland, 1817, and other Manuscript Notes*, edited with a critical introduction by Stanley T. Williams (New Haven, 1927)
4. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1972; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1985), p.316.
5. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden: volume 2 (July 16-October 31, 1888)* (Boston, 1908), p.532.
6. Washington Irving, *Tour In Scotland*, p.25.
7. Washington Irving, *Tour in Scotland*, p.38. The phrase 'witching songs of the nursery earliest days of my childhood' has a biographical explanation in that Irving's father was an Orcadian. The European folk-roots of much of Irving's writing is well-known, and George Mackay Brown has spoken of 'Rip Van Winkle' as a variant on the Orcadian tale 'The Two Fiddlers'. I am grateful to my friend William Sharpton for this interesting detail, which he gleaned when interviewing Mackay Brown in 1995; the interview has subsequently been edited and published in *Chapman*, 84 (1996).
8. Washington Irving, *The Crayon Miscellany*, edited by Dahlia Kirby Terrell (Boston, 1979), pp.123-168 (p.127, p.133).
9. Washington Irving, *Tour In Scotland*, pp.45-46.
10. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991), p.88.
11. Washington Irving, *Tour in Scotland*, pp.51-52.
12. The metaphor of England as 'core' culture, and Scotland and America as sister 'peripheries', is relatively persistent. Key critical essays in the production of this metaphor include John Clive and Bernard Bailyn's 'England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America' (1954), Cairns Craig's 'Peripheries' (1982) and Susan Manning's 'Scotland and America: national literatures? national languages?' (1989). These papers and others are referenced fully elsewhere in this thesis, and provided a great deal of the initial critical impulse for it.

13. Washington Irving, *The Crayon Miscellany*, p.143.
14. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad; or, Things and Thoughts in America and Europe* (1856; rpt. London, 1971), pp.153-154.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, 2 vols (1930; rpt. London, 1957), II, p.807.
16. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, p.157.
17. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, p.155.
18. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, fifth edition (1839; rpt. London, 1927), p.325.
19. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, p.66, p.142.
20. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, p.6.
21. Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (1984; rpt. London, 1993), pp.1-60.
22. Peter Conrad, *Imagining America* (London, 1980), p.32.
23. James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a travelling bachelor*, 2 vols (London, 1828), I, p.275.
24. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), p.183.
25. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p.130.
26. Leith Davis, "'Origins of the Specious': James Macpherson's Ossian and the Forging of the British Empire", *Eighteenth Century*, 34 (1993), 132-150 (p.139).
27. Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh, 1996), pp.82-118, (p.110).
28. [Alexander Dunlop], *American Confessions of a Layman, as connected with the workings of democracy in the United States; with their application to the present condition of Europe* (Edinburgh, 1848).
29. [Alexander Dunlop], *American Confessions of a Layman*, pp.5-6.
30. [Alexander Dunlop], *American Confessions of a Layman*, p.29.
31. [Alexander Dunlop], *American Confessions of a Layman*, p.38.

32. [Alexander Dunlop], *American Confessions of a Layman*, p.48, p.51.
33. Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, in 1773* (London, 1876).
34. Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, p.140.
35. David Simpson, 'Destiny made manifest: the styles of Whitman's poetry', in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London, 1990), pp.177-196 (p.181).
36. Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, p.128.
37. Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, p.101.
38. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p.47.
39. Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989), p.167.
40. Cairns Craig, 'Prologue: Peripheries', in his *Out of History*, pp.11-30.
41. Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, p11.
42. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character: From Oliver Goldsmith to Sylvia Plath* (London, 1983), p.64.
43. Wolfgang Iser, 'Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction', in *Aspects of Narrative*, edited by J. Hillis Miller (New York, 1971), p.5.
44. Edgar Allan Poe, in *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, edited by J. Donald Crowley (London, 1970), pp.141-150 (p.146).
45. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p.17.
46. Quoted in *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, pp.135-140 (p.139).
47. Herman Melville, 'Hawthorne and his Mosses: By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, edited by James McIntosh, Norton Critical Editions (New York and London, 1987), pp.337-350 (p.348).
48. Henry James, 'The New York Preface', in *The Turn of the Screw*, edited by Robert Kimbrough, Norton Critical Editions (New York and London, 1966), p.123.
49. Edgar Allan Poe, in *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, pp.87-94 (p.92).

50. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, pp.80-84 (p.81).
51. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by William Charvat and others (Columbus, Ohio, 1962-), x, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1974), p.6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *MOM*.
52. Herman Melville, 'Bartleby, the Scrivener', in *Billy Budd, Sailor, and other stories* edited with an introduction by Harold Beaver (1967; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1976).
53. Colin Mercer, 'Baudelaire and the city: 1848 and the inscription of hegemony', in *Literature, Politics and Theory*, edited by Francis Barker and others, *New Accents* (London, 1986), pp.17-34 (pp.28-29).
54. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents In American Thought: Volume II, The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860* (1927; rpt. Norman and London, 1987), p.382.
55. Agnes McNeill Donohue, *A Casebook on the Hawthorne Question* (New York, 1963) p.viii.
56. Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (1985; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1990), p.48.
57. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character*, p.29.
58. Gloria C. Erlich, 'Guilt and Expiation in "Roger Malvin's Burial"', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 26 (1972), 377-90 (p.385).
59. Agnes McNeill Donohue, *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild* (Kent, Ohio, 1985), p.184.
60. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford, 1982), p.231.
61. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.40.
62. Agnes McNeill Donohue, *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild*, p.1.
63. Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London, 1879), p.58.
64. See note 46 above.
65. Dennis Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Columbia, Missouri, 1989), p.ix.

66. Lionel Trilling, in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, p.433.
67. Tony Bennett, 'Texts in history: the determination of readings and their texts', in *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, edited by Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (Cambridge, 1987), pp.63-81 (p.69).
68. Lionel Trilling, in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, p.444.
69. Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London, 1977), p.147.
70. Letter to James T. Fields, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, p.308.
71. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.57.
72. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.66.
73. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.67.
74. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.102.
75. Tony Tanner, *Scenes of Nature, Signs of Men* (Cambridge, 1987), p.74.
76. Tony Tanner, *Scenes of Nature, Signs of Men*, p.76.
77. Lionel Trilling, in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, p.447.
78. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Expatriate Tradition in American Literature*, British Association for American Studies, BAAS Pamphlets in American Studies, 9 (1982), pp.16-17.
79. Susan Manning, 'Hawthorne', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 17 (1988), 109-25 (p.118).
80. Richard H. Fogle, 'Ambiguity and Clarity in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"', *New England Quarterly*, 18 (1945), 448-65 (p.452).
81. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Expatriate Tradition in American Literature*, p.17.
82. Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (Harmondsworth and New York, 1981), p.135.
83. Taylor Stoehr, "'Young Goodman Brown" and Hawthorne's Theory of Mimesis', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 23 (1968-69), 393-412 (p.404).
84. See Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870* (New Haven and London, 1957), p.131.

Houghton writes: 'Carlyle's mean opinion of creative literature, already traced to Puritan and commercial influences, was partly indebted to his struggle with doubt. In

the important essay 'Biography' (1832), he set up two categories of writing: Reality, meaning the recorded facts of history or individual lives, and Fiction, whether in prose or verse. The latter is always unsatisfactory, he says, because it produces a tension between imagination and understanding, the imagination urging one to accept as true what the understanding warns him is false [...]. Obviously, Carlyle is failing to recognise the symbolic character of creative literature'.

85. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by William H. Gilman and others, 16 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960-82) IX (1971), p.113.

86. Quoted in Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy*, p.33.

87. Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy*, p.viii.

88. Walt Whitman, 'Preface to 1855 Edition of *Leaves of Grass*', in *Leaves of Grass*, edited by Emory Holloway (New York, 1954), p.501.

89. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, IX, *Twice-Told Tales* (1974), p.306.

90. Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1961), p.137.

91. Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision*, p.146.

92. William Brock, *Scotus Americanus: A Survey of the sources for links between Scotland and America in the eighteenth century* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp.93-94.

93. Hyatt H. Waggoner, 'Art and Belief', in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, pp.167-95 (p.189).

94. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.67.

95. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.52.

96. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, p.65.

97. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, I, *The Scarlet Letter* (1962), p.8. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed SL.

98. John Carlos Rowe, *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Modern Theory* (Baltimore, 1982), p.14.

99. Susan Manning, 'Hawthorne', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 17 (1988), 109-25 (p.121).

100. Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, introduction by Richard P. Blackmur (New York and London, 1935), p.222.

101. Hyatt H. Waggoner, in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, p.192.

Chapter 2

'These pirates of the sphere'¹: Melville and the Economics of Identity

Following on from the discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's ironic understanding of the mutability of discursive constructions of identity, this chapter is mainly concerned with two of Herman Melville's most discussed narratives, *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd, Sailor: an inside narrative*. In these works, we find a concerted effort to interrogate identity as an ideological construct. The specific ideologies which are attended to, namely imperial expansion and capitalist economics, are deconstructed through the textuality of the writing itself. Melville's aesthetic practice, the open-ended narrative, dismantles these very closed and reductive ideologies.

I would like to take as a starting point the opinion of the leading Marxist historian and critic C.L.R. James's, who defined Ishmael, *Moby-Dick*'s narrator-protagonist, as 'an intellectual Ahab';² this makes sense as a part of James's reading of that novel as, above all else, a masterpiece of characterization. James reads the novel as being unproblematically centred around the figure of Captain Ahab, seen as the perfect rendering of 'the totalitarian type'.³ While his strongly materialist reading of *Moby-Dick* is an original and provoking one, James's insistence upon Ahab's absolute centrality to the narrative and the structure of the book does not, I feel, permit full valency to the operation of textual multiplicity; in particular, it renders the act of narration unproblematical.

I will seek to show in this chapter the ways in which *Moby-Dick* articulates some of the particular problems of establishing an 'identity' for any character within a story, and the specific ways in which these problems relate to Melville's historical situation. As with Nathaniel Hawthorne, the modern reader must, I feel, avoid any temptation to allegorize when reading Melville; these two writers produce texts with a superficial layer of allegory, yet both demand that the reader goes beyond such readings in order to permit the writings their full effect. The historical situation of

Melville and Hawthorne provides the clearest clues as to why the trope of allegory is ultimately parodied in their fictions; and, whereas the univocality of allegory abolishes any problematic of identity, Melville and Hawthorne heighten this problematic through contradictory narrative.

While the ideological formulations of identity itself are deconstructed in *Moby-Dick*, they are necessarily tied up in the more general problem of the act of interpretation. In his description of the attention paid by Ahab to the doubloon, which stands as a reward to the first sailor to spot the white whale, Ishmael makes apparent the importance he himself attaches to interpretation:

One morning, turning to pass the doubloon, he [Ahab] seemed to be newly attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them. And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as they do hills about Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky Way.⁴

We notice that Ahab 'seemed to be' interested in the doubloon's inscriptions, and that it is 'as though' Ahab is reading them egotistically; in effect, Ishmael transposes his own anxiety about interpretation, and more particularly about the possibility of the world being without meaning and merely a cipher, onto Ahab. It is this desire to impose a 'meaning', to read the world as if it were a product of specifically human agency, which Ishmael articulates throughout his narrative. A recent critic has written that 'the doubloon's meaning is not in the coin but in the different observers; the doubloon's abundance of signs accommodates all interpretations and offers a language to each understanding', and this seems to be another way of making the point that the doubloon is read ideologically.⁵ However, it is Ishmael's insistence upon a 'certain significance' in 'all things', beyond their mere material existence, which exposes the anxiety of the narrator and is indicative of an ideology of metaphysics.

What makes for the ambiguity of *Moby-Dick*, though, is Ishmael's wavering account of such a world of 'certain significance'. It is precisely because he warns the reader against abstract theorizing, while indulging in this practice himself, that we can read Ishmael's narrative in a multitude of ways. Also, this indeterminacy of meaning is paralleled by an increasingly non-specific narrative 'voice'; so the voice that says 'Call me Ishmael' cannot simply be equated with the voice which says, 'Penetrating further and further into the heart of the Japanese cruising ground, the *Pequod* was soon all astir in the fishery. Often, in mild, pleasant weather, for twelve, fifteen, eighteen, and twenty hours on the stretch, they were engaged in the boats' (*MD*, p.601). In this last passage, the word 'they' distances the narrator from the action, and in particular from 'the *Pequod*' upon which Ishmael sails. What Wai-chee Dimock says about the narrator of the first fifty chapters of *Mardi* can be applied also to Ishmael: 'the narrator is not so much a character as a voice, and as a voice—a fluid linguistic, presence—he seems to inhabit the same narrative space as the author'.⁶

The idea, or ideal, of identity is problematized from the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, and Ishmael seems fully aware of the difficult necessity of adopting a new identity to suit new circumstances:

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the fore-castle, aloft there to the royal mast-head. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you.

(*MD*, p.96)

In exposing the supposed classlessness of post-revolutionary America, this passage posits a singular case of changed social position, and Ishmael is seeking to effect a relationship with the reader which relies upon a mutuality of education and reading, yet which provides Ishmael, with his 'old established family' and 'one's sense of

honor', with a measure of social privilege. While Ishmael's willingness to leave the schoolroom for the 'tar-pot' suggests an openness to experience, it becomes apparent that he is unable to leave behind him his educated identity in order to become fully incorporated into that of the ship's crew. Such contradictory impulses are central to Ishmael's rhetoric, and to his representation of his own self through the written word; the paradoxes and ambiguities of the fictional character Ishmael accord with the private expressions of the 'real' Melville regarding the capacity of an American, specifically Melville himself, to be *both* labourer and thinker. In 1847, Melville had written to his British publisher, John Murray:

You ask again for 'documentary evidence' of my having been in the South Seas, wherewithall to convince the unbelievers—Bless my soul, Sir, will you Britons not credit that an American can be a gentleman, & have read the Waverley Novels, tho every digit may have been in the tar-bucket?—You make miracles of what are commonplaces to us.—I will give no evidence—Truth is mighty & will prevail—& shall & must.⁷

The antagonism which still persisted between America and Britain in 1847, some sixty years after the Declaration of Independence was predicated principally, like the Revolutionary War itself, upon the question of democratic values. It is clear from the above quotation that Melville still perceived Britain as a class-based society, in which a rigid social hierarchy prevailed. Melville's straight-spoken manner echoes the rhetorical strategies of Tom Paine, propagandist for the American Revolution; Britain is mocked for its irrational doubt of what were mere 'commonplace[s]' of democracy. Against the superstitious suspicions of class-ridden Britain stands Melville's 'Truth'. In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, he had stated that 'a thief in jail is as honorable a person as Gen. George Washington. This is ludicrous. But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun'.⁸ In *Moby-Dick*, America is itself represented as being economically hierarchical, with class-divisions concealed beneath egalitarian rhetoric. And 'freedom' emerges as a relative concept, with *national* identity submerged in dominant economic structures.

It might be fruitful to consider at this early stage some passages highlighting Ishmael's self-contradiction; from these examples we might more readily be able to

approach the problem of identity, and of interpretation generally in *Moby-Dick*. The question of what kind of narrative is being offered by Ishmael is complex. The reader's temptation to settle on a uniform way of reading and interpreting the text is in some places encouraged by Ishmael, only to be forcefully opposed in other places. A dialectic of, on the one hand an acceptance of the materiality of the world, and on the other hand metaphysical and metaphorical interpretations of that world, operates throughout the text. Insisting upon the actuality of whaling, upon the fact of its processes, Ishmael writes the following: 'So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory' (*MD*, p.306). The reality of the 'plain facts', then, should warn the reader away from the 'intolerable' genre of allegory, a metaphysical reading which is 'more detestable' even than 'monstrous fable'. This is the no-nonsense voice of the hardened fisherman, with no time for the untruths of metaphor and symbolism. Stephen Fender writes of 'the cult of the commonplace'⁹ in post-Revolutionary, post-Puritan America, and Ishmael's 'voice' often chimes with that of Tom Paine. For his political tracts, Paine claimed to use 'nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense' as weapons in what was actually the most ideological of struggles.¹⁰ Ishmael is in many ways an idealized American, as Paine might have wished him to be: democratic, liberal, rational, yet still, as we shall see, Christian.

In the light of the last-quoted words of Ishmael, we have only to consider any of a number of passages in the novel to dispel the notion that Ishmael projects a unified and unifying narrative voice and identity. In chapter 8, 'The Pulpit', Ishmael's language is redolent with the ideology of Christian evangelism:

Nor was the pulpit itself without a trace of the same sea-taste that had achieved the ladder and the picture. Its panelled front was in the likeness of a ship's bluff bows, and the Holy Bible rested on a projecting piece of scroll work, fashioned after a ship's fiddle-headed beak.

What could be more full of meaning?—for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of Breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.

(MD, pp.133-4)

The passage is characterized by metaphysical abstraction—'What could be more full of meaning?' It is important to go beyond an unproblematic reading of the changing patterns in Ishmael's narrating voice as somehow being indicative of a change in character, and we should resist reading *Moby-Dick* as a kind of *Bildungsroman* in which our hero undergoes various struggles and emerges a changed individual. There seems to be no consistent progressive pattern to these differing modes of narrative rhetoric, the imposition of a single meaning is resisted by the multivocality of the text. Like reality beyond the text, the text does not conform to human desires for linear narrative:

The mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracting progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:—through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence's doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally.

(MD, p.602)

Like the Nantucketeers' retention of 'the peculiarities of the Quaker', Ishmael's variously aristocratic, educated and puritan language is 'anomalously modified by things altogether alien and heterogeneous' (MD, p.169). So, when Ishmael, and the reader, first encounter Ahab, we recognise the physical description of Ahab as being a reflection of Ishmael's own highly specific knowledge:

Reality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarterdeck.

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them,

or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus.

(MD, p.218)

This 'reality' is Ishmael's first sighting of Ahab, and it quickly gives way to things that only 'seemed', thus revealing Ahab's classical heroism as a projection of Ishmael's desire.

This tendency in Ishmael to impose his own idealization of identity onto the subjects of his narrative—Ahab, the crew, the whale, the sea and the world at large—creates a discursive contradiction within the novel between Ishmael's specific ideological reading of the material world, and the textual and extra-textual impulses running counter to this ideology. 'To enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast' Ishmael claims (MD, p.148), and this notion of the dialectical structure of nature, and of society too, is central to the problem of identity as posited in *Moby-Dick*. The educated and puritan language which establishes a sense of Ishmael's linguistic identity at the beginning of the novel, becomes even more strongly a language of capitalist individualism as the novel proceeds and as Ishmael becomes involved as a crew member aboard the *Pequod*. The 'contrast' to this bourgeois ideology is that of collectivist and unalienated work, as we shall see.

The identity of capitalist shareholder and individualist is not so much claimed by Ishmael for himself directly, as bestowed upon the reader and also, if ironically, the uncivilized Queequeg in passing. As subjects, both reader and Queequeg are incorporated into Ishmael's world-view, named and identified as capitalists:

[Queequeg] seemed to be saying to himself— 'It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians' [...].

People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest.

(MD, p.157; p.169)

The identities of Queequeg and of 'you' the reader are here defined quite clearly in terms of capitalist ownership and investment procedures. Not only is the reader particularly addressed in terms of an economic relationship, but the reader's position within that relationship is fixed as a privileged owner of capital, rather than as a seller of his own labour. Ishmael is addressing those who are like him; those who have privilege and who understand the demands of the market economy. It is important to remember that Ishmael *chooses* to sail as a whaler. In the account of what Queequeg 'seemed to be saying'—much as Ahab 'seemed to be' attracted to the doubloon—Ishmael universalizes this class-view to encompass the consciousness of a native of an island 'not down in any map' (*MD*, p.150).

The specific relationships of capitalist enterprise are evoked throughout *Moby-Dick*, most clearly in the character of Starbuck and in the roles of the various crew members; I would argue that class—social and economic, based upon labour—is the most pervasive form by which the construct of identity is identified in *Moby-Dick*. One of Melville's fellow-Americans wrote, in 1845:

Our agricultural regions even are infected with the same anxious spirit of gain. If ever the curse of labor was upon the race, it is upon us; nor is it simply now 'by the sweat of thy brow thou shalt earn thy bread. Labor for a livelihood is dignified. But we labor for bread, and labor for pride, and *labor* for pleasure. A man's life with us *does* consist of the abundance of the things which he possesseth. To get, and to have the reputation of possessing, is the ruling passion. To it are bent all the energies of nine-tenths of our population [threatening...] to convert our whole people into mere money-changers and producers.¹¹

We are reminded here of Hawthorne's lament in 'The Celestial Rail-road' for 'so many a wild, free mountain-torrent' which becomes, by the process of capitalist expansion, a mere 'slave of human ingenuity'.¹² Ahab's maniacal pursuit of the white whale is not undertaken for purposes of pecuniary profit, but as a personal vendetta, and it is Starbuck who challenges not just the idea of pursuit for such a purpose, but in its place elevates the profit-motive itself to something worth dying for:

‘What’s this long face about, Mr Starbuck; wilt thou not chase the white whale? art not game for Moby Dick?’

‘I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market.’

(MD, p.261)

The ‘Nantucket market’, then, is one centre of meaning within the world of *Moby-Dick*; for Starbuck, it is the justification and the impetus behind the *Pequod*’s journey, yet it seems to be irrelevant for Ahab who chases Moby-Dick out of vengeance. However, Ishmael’s narrative invests Ahab’s consciousness, and hence his identity, with a full awareness of the world of the market. Ahab’s authority derives from his commercial value as a whaling captain and what underpins the relationships aboard the *Pequod* are economic motivations and structures of capital. In the opening chapter, Ishmael stresses the economic imperative lying behind his own decisions:

I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But *being paid*, — what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!

(MD, p.97)

This recognition of the desire for money, for ‘*being paid*’, locates Ishmael within the dominating matrix of nineteenth-century capitalist ideology, and later in the novel he extends this imperative to the thoughts of the supposedly irrational and crazed Ahab: ‘They may scorn cash now; but let some months go by, and no perspective promise of it to them, and then this same quiescent cash all at once mutinying in them, this same cash would soon cashier Ahab’ (MD, p.314). Melville is here establishing the hegemonic sway of the market; understanding that commodification of things,

enacted through monetary exchange, inevitably also includes the commodification of human beings, through the processes of labour. In Britain, Thomas Carlyle had already decried the totalitarian nature of the commodity culture, writing in *Past and Present* (1843): 'We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named "fair competition" and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that *Cash-payment* is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that *it* absolves and liquidates all engagements of man.' Carlyle looked to nature for his witness, 'a voice from the dumb bosom of Nature, saying to us: "Behold! supply-and-demand is not the one Law of Nature; Cash-payment is not the sole nexus of man with man, how far from it!"' .¹³

The effects of this structuration of power around money are made manifest in *Moby-Dick* through the separate but interconnected representations of firstly, Ahab's identity, and secondly, the crew's various reactions to their subordinate position in the hierarchy of the *Pequod*. What reads as a defining statement of the reality of Ahab's own position in terms of relationships is delivered, by Ahab to Starbuck, as a monologue in the chapter entitled 'The Symphony':

'When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without—oh, weariness! heaviness! Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command!—when I think of all this; only half-suspected, not so keenly known to me before—and how for forty years I have fed upon dry salted fare—fit emblem of the dry nourishment of my soul!—when the poorest landsman has had fresh fruit to his daily hand, and broken the world's fresh bread to my mouldy crusts.'

(*MD*, p.651)

Ahab's humanity is evoked fully here, and the structure of the system is seen to imprison both commander and crew; as in *Billy Budd*, what might be read allegorically as a neo-biblical narrative concerned with predestination is instead opened up by the detailed attention paid by Melville to the specific ideological forces

at work within the imagined world of the novel. Ahab's words to his boat crew during the final pursuit of the whale emphasize this point: "the first thing that but offers to jump from this boat I stand in, that thing I harpoon. Ye are not other men, but my arms and my legs; and so obey me" (*MD*, p.679). The crew are rendered as objects, as 'things', who are merely the limbs of Ahab, their social identity fixed by their position within the hierarchy of the maritime industry:

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.

(*MD*, p.666)

The crew's identities are subsumed in that of Ahab, and Ahab's in the *Pequod*. This is a forceful rendering in fictional narrative, by an author who had himself been a mutinous whaler, of precisely that alienating effect of industrialized labour, tending 'to turn men into machines',¹⁴ which Alexis de Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America* argues did not exist in America. By reading *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd* as mediations of particular material relationships, we avoid rendering them as mere allegories for something else, as Ishmael, in one of his identities, warns us against doing: *Moby-Dick*, we must remember, is not 'a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory' (*MD*, p.306).

Ahab's power is of course emphasized throughout the narrative, and this power is grounded not only in the capitalist economic system, but also in the correlative project of imperialism. The irony is indeed heavy, that whereas Melville and Hawthorne, Emerson and Whitman were forging 'distinctive American literary inventions',¹⁵ the nation itself had been, and was, engaging in imperialist expansion—the very kind of actions against which the 'free' nation of America had proclaimed itself a bulwark: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal [...]'.¹⁶

Far from being a narrative proclaiming and mediating America's rhetoric on its own perfected egalitarianism, *Moby-Dick* is redolent with the discourse of empire; Ishmael says 'I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts', fulfilling the role of adventurer and colonizer (*MD*, p.98). This imperialist facet of Ishmael's identity is not peculiar to him, but is part of the 'character' of the Nantucketeers:

And thus have these naked Nantucketeers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketeer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires.

(*MD*, pp.158-9)

And this exploitation of the seas, by the Nantucketeers, is paralleled by the specific forms of human exploitation required by the American whaling industry. In the light of such passages as the following, it is baffling that many critics consider Melville to be promoting the hegemony of American individualism and capitalism in *Moby-Dick*:

At the present day not one in two of the many thousand men before the mast employed in the American whale fishery, are American born, though pretty nearly all the officers are. Herein it is the same with the American whale fishery as with the American army and military and merchant navies, and the engineering forces employed in the construction of the American Canals and Railroads. The same, I say, because in all these cases the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles.

(*MD*, p.216)

The word 'generously' is the cutting edge of this passage. In its growing role as an industrial and military power, America is here being written of as highly hierarchical state; universalist notions of equality and freedom are seen to be relative and ideologically-determined. In chapter four of this thesis, I consider Richard Henry Dana's evocation of an American whaler, aboard which the only equality was that of being a slave. Writing on Melville's resistance to the hegemonic discourse of

American capitalism, Wai-chee Dimock rightly points out that 'freedom is only the positive pole within a double formation, a constitutive polarity of terms [...] freedom and dominion, sovereignty and subjection.'¹⁷ The irony is completed by the implication of the reader in this process of exploitation; the 'officers' of industry are of course the managers, but even more they are the stock-holders, and we are reminded that 'people in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that *you do yours* in approved state stocks bringing in good interest' (emphasis mine).

William Brandon's comment in *The American Heritage Book of Indians*, concerning the wars waged among themselves by the imperialist European powers in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, seems peculiarly apposite to *Moby-Dick*: the Europeans, wrote Brandon sardonically, showed themselves 'ready to fight to the last Indian'.¹⁸ For 'Europeans' we can read 'white Americans' in *Moby-Dick*, and for 'Indian' read 'non-white American'. The historical fact of exploitation is consistently reiterated by Ishmael, sometimes in a matter-of-fact, naturalizing way as above ('people in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels'), but also in more direct and rhetorical ways: 'For God's sake, be economical with your lamps and candles! not a gallon you burn, but at least one drop of man's blood was spilled for it' (*MD*, p.306).

The systems which oppress and confine all on the *Pequod* are political and economic ones, the identity of each individual determined by their positions within these structures; yet Ishmael does experience a sense of escape from the confinements of his own "identity" in the chapter 'A Squeeze of the Hand', and it is important to recognise the full efficacy of this scene in a reading of *Moby-Dick* which seeks to be aware of the novel's literariness and of its foregrounding of ideology.

The contingent and relative nature of 'free-will' is dramatized earlier in Queequeg's lowering to the slain whale, with Ishmael tied to Queequeg so that 'for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no

more, then both usage and honor demanded that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake' (*MD*, p.426). Ishmael expands upon his predicament:

So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motion, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. Therefore, I saw that here was a sort of interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so great an injustice. And yet still further pondering—while I jerked him now and then from between the whale and the ship, which would threaten to jam him—still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals.

(*MD*, p.426)

This passage foregrounds some of the principal concerns of Ishmael's narrative; the socializing process of work, the hegemony of capitalist ideology—evidenced in the metaphor of a 'joint stock company or two'—and the contingent nature of free-will.

In the chapter 'A Squeeze of the Hand' Ishmael experiences full communion with his fellow labourers, and by extension all of humanity; the alienating effect of wage-labour and the divisiveness of the hierarchical structures of capitalism and imperialism are dissolved, however fleetingly, through physical contact with fellow sailors and the whale's commodity:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.

(*MD*, p.527)

There is an eroticism to this passage arising out of its praise of egalitarian sentiments and its rhapsodic rhythm; and it is not homo-eroticism alone, because we see that both the 'milk and sperm of kindness' are alluded to. This is Ishmael's attempt to 'wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity'.¹⁹ In a fictive world almost entirely populated by men, this is one clear indication of Melville's interest in humanity as a whole. By contrast to Ishmael's communistic sense of fellow-feeling, Ahab's contract with the crew is a 'horrible oath'.

Paradoxically, in its evocation of an undifferentiated humanity, the above passage provides one of the most apposite links between humanity, the white whale and the specific workings of literary discourse. Ishmael's momentary release from his own differentiated, yet alienated, individual place in the ship's system, allows him to momentarily transgress the discursive boundaries of individualism; and it is such overdetermination which underlies the figuring of the whale and the textuality of the novel. This does not imply that the whale is purely symbolic and thus somehow separate from the imagined material world of the novel; in fact, quite the opposite. The 'mystery' of the whale is a powerful manifestation of its resistance to the totalizing ideologies of human society; the repeated assertions regarding its unknowableness, and also, paradoxically, its physical actuality, mean the whale lies beyond the compass of full human knowledge. Moby Dick has no essential or uniform "meaning"—it is a whale; and its symbolic potentialities are overdetermined.

The subjective contingencies, or we might say the production, of meaning is brought to the fore early in the novel, when Ishmael comes across a painting within a lodging house:

On one side hung a very large oil-painting so thoroughly be-smoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal cross-lights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose. Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows [...].

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant.

(MD, p.103)

Like the novel itself, the painting is mysterious, but Ishmael at this point believes in systems and diligence as ways of getting at 'its purpose' and 'meaning', despite the 'indefinite, half-attained' character, and the novel is in part a sustained debate upon the nature of knowledge and interpretation. Ishmael's tendency for self-contradiction simply emphasizes the problematical nature of human subjectivity.

That individual and national identity are not fixed, universal attributes, but are contingent and ideologically determined, is implied in various ways throughout *Moby-Dick*. I have already described some of the ways in which the narrative confirms a determining link between labour and identity at any given time. Likewise, speech is invested with a power to signify identity:

'He says he's our man, Bildad,' said Peleg, 'he wants to ship.'

'Dost thee?' said Bildad, in a hollow tone, and turning round to me.

'I *dost*,' said I unconsciously, he was so intense a Quaker.

(MD, p.172)

Yet, the intensity of Bildad's Quakerism is purely linguistic; it is revealed as a creed of rhetoric, rather than one of deed. So even the most clearly identifiable groups in society, identifiable and singular due to their 'peculiarities', contain contradictory elements:

For all this immutableness, was there some lack of common consistency about worthy Captain Bildad. Though refusing, from conscientious scruples, to bear arms against land invaders, yet himself had illimitably invaded the Atlantic and Pacific; and though a sworn foe to human bloodshed, yet had he in his straight-bodied coat, spilled tuns upon tuns of leviathan gore. How now in the contemplative evening of his days, the pious Bildad reconciled these things in the reminiscence, I do not know;

but it did not seem to concern him much, and very probably he had long since come to the sage and sensible conclusion that a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another. This world pays dividends.

(MD, p.170)

Economic imperatives transcend the efficacy of religious dogma in the practical world; indeed, they incorporate it, justifying imperialist profiteering and "exploration" under the banner of Christian missionary work; the non-Christian world, whether in the South Seas or on American soil, is 'saved' by being exploited or destroyed.

The hunt for the whale articulates this process, being as much an invasion of the whale's natural domain as the colonizer's is an invasion of the indigenous natives' home. Importantly, Ahab is not peculiar among whaling captains in aggressiveness; his identity as the mad captain is not his alone, but is a particular manifestation of the 'desolation of solitude', 'the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness', and the 'Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command' (MD, p.651):

New Zealand Tom and Don Miguel, after at various times creating great havoc among the boats of different vessels, were finally gone in quest of, systematically hunted out, chased and killed by valiant whaling captains, who heaved up their anchors with that express object as much in view, as in setting out through the Narragansett Woods, Captain Butler of old had it in his mind to capture that notorious murderous savage Annawon, the headmost warrior of the Indian King Philip.

(MD, p.305)

The whaling-captain acts like a colonial invader, and as a class and a group with a discernible identity, he is the direct antagonist of the whale; so it is perhaps unsurprising that Ahab's identity as an individual is determined, by Ahab and Ishmael, as a function of his relationship with the whale. As both narrator, and hence reader, only encounter Ahab as a whaling-captain then it is in this social role that we understand and interpret him; Ahab's actions in the hunt for the whale become the working definition of Ahab as an individual. *Moby-Dick*, especially in the character

of Ahab, formalizes the connection between the constructed ideology of identity, and the actuality of human labour and relationships.

Ahab's insistence upon finding 'meanings', and Ishmael's similarly obsessive rhetoric, seduce the actual reader of the novel into attitudes of philosophical reflection; the power of Ahab's rhetoric can deafen us to the straightforward facticity of much of the novel. Paradoxically, Ahab's self-doubt can actually work to confirm the materiality of the world:

'All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think that there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.'

(*MD*, p.262)

In his desire to believe in the existence of a metaphysical 'unknown but still reasoning thing', Ahab mocks the material world as a prison, a prison for which the whale is merely a symbol, a visible metaphor. Ahab here perceives the actuality of the world, its physicality and his relationship with the whale, yet is disposed to think of these actualities as being mere metaphors for something more 'reasoning'; that is, he reads the world as a human construct, bestowing upon the natural world specific ideological attributes of civilized humanity. The whale is rendered as a symbol, so that 'all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it' (*MD*, p.283).

Moby-Dick replicates as metaphor and linguistic signs the actual economic and social processes of the human world. Exploitation and deracination, invasion and destruction, are posited as specific attributes of the whaling industry on the micro-economic and political level, and of capitalism on the macro level; of American maritime discipline in particular, but of social hierarchical patterns more generally. Yet, because of its striking attention to the nature of language and textuality, to the words on the page, *Moby-Dick* is not an orthodox work of social realism. I have already discussed some of the ways in which human interpretation, and the desire to interpret in the first place, is portrayed in this novel, yet it is through the agency of the narrating voice that *Moby-Dick* most powerfully problematizes the question of the reading and interpretation of signs.

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted a crucial passage from the novel in regards to the nature of the construction of interpretation:

What most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant.

(*MD*, p.103)

The language refers to the indeterminacy of the picture; what is depicted is 'something' in a 'nameless yeast'. And this unsettles Ishmael for this very reason, that it is nameless, it cannot be given a 'meaning' by him. If we like, it cannot be owned by him. For the rest of the novel, the whale itself takes on this role of unfixable sign for Ishmael, thus refuting his initial sense of his own identity as settled and uniform; for if Ishmael cannot interpret the whale, and he cannot, although he certainly tries to, then how can he himself be anything other than a mass of unfixable signs? If there is no fixable 'meaning' to the picture, there can be no essential identity for Ishmael, or Ahab, or the whale; they are what they are solely in

relation to their surroundings and to each other—identity is figured as process, not as essence.

This idea of identity as a constant state of flux is given credence within *Moby-Dick* by Ishmael's concentration upon the forms and usages of language, and of the written word in particular. For if identity is a form of language, as the novel suggests, then it *can only be* contingent and unstable, its definition being dependent upon the various rules and customs of a language; indeed, upon the currency of language, or the semiotics of signs if we like. If we understand language itself to be a form of exchange, of mediation, then the assertion that *Moby-Dick* grounds its entire system of metaphor in economy',²⁰ is not as reductive as it might otherwise seem.

This emphasis upon language as an active, even laborious, medium is made manifest when Ishmael makes it clear that his narrative is in part an attempt to capture linguistically what Ahab wishes to capture physically:

It is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it. To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. "Will he" (the leviathan) "make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!" But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands: I am in earnest; and I will try.

(MD, pp.229-30)

The 'fearful' task of writing about whales is rendered as awful as the chasing of them, if not more so, and the metaphorical swim through libraries forges a linguistic connection with the literal sailing through oceans. The attempt to understand the whale as a species is rendered in the language of bibliography; so the actual thing, the whale, is categorized in terms of a purely human cultural and social artefact, the printed book: 'According to magnitude I divide the whales into three primary BOOKS (subdivisible into CHAPTERS), and these shall comprehend them all, both small and large', which Ishmael respectively terms the Folio, Octavo and Duodecimo

whales (*MD*, p.231). This ridiculous simplification is defended as being 'the only one that can possibly succeed, for it alone is practicable' (*MD*, p.235). Language is a practical system, and is therefore a convenient way of establishing the differences between types of whale; however the contingent, and hence limited, efficacy of language as a signifying system is foregrounded in such a way as to question the supposed usefulness of the 'Bibliographical system here adopted'. Referring to a particular term of cetological classification, Ishmael says that 'it is of great importance to mention, that however such a nomenclature may be convenient in facilitating allusions to some kind of whales, yet it is in vain to attempt a clear classification of the Leviathan, founded upon either his baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth' (*MD*, p.234); what is emphasized by this sentence is that naming is a convenience, not a property of the thing itself, that to identify a thing is to define it in terms of a given system and not to approach any privileged essence or prior fact about it.

Yet, for all his knowingness about language as system and whale as mystery, and the critical eye he throws over Ahab's 'frantic morbidness', Ishmael attempts to 'read' the whale and the world in terms of his own world-view. The interpretations which are credited to Ahab—for example, 'all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick' (*MD*, p.283)—are problematized by Ishmael's own ideological readings of the whale and the world, so that we come to see his description of Ahab as similarly ideological. The feelings which Ishmael insists he himself has towards the whale are as mystifying and irrational as those he attributes to Ahab:

Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but awaken in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught.

(*MD*, p.287)

Ishmael does not know what it is about the whale that horrifies him. Yet his horror is a product of his attempt to read into the whale a meaning which it does not, in itself, and cannot, carry. The 'despair' nearly felt at the task of rendering for the reader the metaphysical horror represented by the whale comes from the contradictory nature of Ishmael's intellectualizing; while stating throughout the novel that the whale is merely a whale and that at heart his experience is of 'the realities of the whaleman' not a neo-biblical Jonah. Whereas Bildad's 'lack of common consistency [...] did not seem to concern him much, and very probably he had long since come to the sage and sensible conclusion that a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another' (*MD*, p.170), Ishmael cannot himself be so sanguine regarding his own confused ideas.

Recurrent references to writing and interpreting betray Ishmael's desire for control. Language is posited as a basis for power, and the whale is unsubduable because it is unreadable:

Is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?

(*MD*, pp.295-6)

If the whale's whiteness is paradoxically both an absence of all colour,²¹ and an absolute presence of colour—the full spectrum—then Ishmael's attempts to 'read' the whale, and the equally forceful rhetoric against even trying to *see* a whale—because 'you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him' (*MD*, p.371)—constitute an analogous deconstruction of the ideology of knowledge. The ironic doubleness of the whale's whiteness has implications for the entire process of signification: 'whiteness is both the absence of color on a surface and that which makes other colors visible in their difference from it. Such differentiation is what makes signification possible; whiteness is thus an absence of signification that contains the potential for all signification.'²²

The topography of the natural world is itself rendered in terms of human discourse, and interestingly Melville's troping of the earth as a signifying entity, a carrier of meaning—at least for Ishmael—is echoed in Frederick Jackson Turner's influential *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1894).²³ For Ishmael, the sea is protected from the incursion of human history, and all that it entails, by its very liquidity: 'how I spurned that turnpike earth!—that common highway all over dented with the marks of slavish heels and hoofs; and turned me to admire the magnanimity of the sea which will permit no records' (*MD*, p.155). The sea erases humanity's presence, so history cannot be 'read' on the sea's surface itself; whereas on the 'turnpike earth', Turner sees the recording of presence as being bound up in the very making of social forms: 'the Indian trade pioneered the way for civilization. The buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this because the trader's "trace"; the trails widened into roads, and the roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads'. Indeed, Turner grounds his entire approach to history firmly in the narrative mode in a striking simile which becomes pure metaphor, asserting that 'the United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from west to east we find the record of social evolution'.²⁴

We note the privileging of the east coast as somehow a more advanced form of society. The 'text' of America suggests, for Turner, that the domination of the continent by white, English-speaking, Protestants is somehow natural, part of 'evolution'. And while Turner is far from being overtly racist or reactionary—is in fact quite the opposite in tone—implicitly his thesis rests upon the same idea of America's 'manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions',²⁵ which formed, and forms, a central plank of the political and ideological self-knowledge of America's dominant discourse. The ideology of Manifest Destiny was taken up significantly by Walt Whitman, although he later—as I show in chapter four of this thesis—was to recant and call for a stay-at-home foreign policy. However, when editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, Whitman had written that 'Mexico must be thoroughly chastised!'

for daring to oppose America's annexation of Texas in the late 1840s;²⁶ Mexico was itself subsequently invaded and land-robbed.

In *Moby-Dick*, by contrast, and against that dominant discourse, we come up against an unknowable natural world, and a social dimension which is revealed to be limited to the parameters permitted by the peculiarities of economic and political control; the natural world and the social system are not analogous, they defy each other much as Ahab and the whale defy each other. As *Moby-Dick* has it, 'we know the sea to be an everlasting terra incognita, so that Columbus sailed over numberless unknown worlds to discover his one superficial western one' (*MD*, p.379).

The act of writing the narrative, and of writing on the body—both Queequeg and Ishmael, as well as the whale itself, are 'written' upon, and all are ultimately beyond full interpretation—problematize the whole process of communication. Because, much as the whale is unknowable, without language we are left with silence and the alienation from the social which it brings; when Ishmael pleads 'landlord, stop whittling. You and I must understand one another, and that too without delay', it is a cry for sociality, for an acknowledgment of the individual's presence (*MD*, p.111). And it is language, and communication in general, as process which asserts human self-consciousness in the face of the dominant nineteenth-century western discourses of individualism and exploitative relationships; and while language signifies the ineradicable gap between individuals, it is a constitutive means to bridging this gap. It is Ahab, in his 'Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command', who personifies the forces which serve to maintain the alienated individual. In one brilliantly succinct passage, we read of an imagined encounter between a representative of aristocratic power in England and labouring fishermen over who owns the catch:

'Please Sir, who is the Lord Warden?'

'The Duke.'

'But the Duke had nothing to do with taking this fish?'

'It is his.'

'We have been at great trouble, and peril, and some expense, and is all that to go to the Duke's benefit; we getting nothing at all for our pains but blisters?'

'It is his.'
 'Is the Duke so very poor as to be forced to this desperate mode of
 getting a livelihood.'
 'It is his.'
 'I thought to relieve my old bed-ridden mother by part of my share of
 this whale.'
 'It is his.'
 'Won't the Duke be content with a quarter or a half?'
 'It is his.'

(MD, p.510)

The reiterated statement "it is his" makes transparent the fact that language is structured by, and responsive to, hierarchy and power; here, the specific power of possession. The refusal to expand beyond this plain statement of established legality signifies social division and points up the specific economic and political relationships extant between the fishermen and the 'very learned and most Christian and charitable gentleman'. In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville referred to 'my ruthless democracy';²⁷ this ideological position is mediated through narrative and form in *Moby-Dick*. It is a novel which questions the ideology of authority, not merely through its representation, and deconstruction, of 'the totalitarian type', Ahab, and the 'intellectual Ahab', Ishmael; and not only through its representation of the process of exploitative labour as it exists aboard an American whaling-ship; but through its ways of telling, its modes of discourse.

Frederic Jameson claims 'post-modernist' status for Conrad's *Lord Jim* because its narrative revolves around not 'points of view so much as sources of language', where 'Conrad's yarn-spinning becomes the epitome of a thinking which has discovered the symbolic';²⁸ such claims might as legitimately be made for the earlier *Moby-Dick*, in which the question of the 'character' of the narrator—and of course of whether he is 'reliable' or not—gives way to the operation of textuality beyond individual utterance. For the same reason, we should avoid reading *Moby-Dick* as Ahab's story, in which 'Ahab becomes a polarizing presence that threatens, if indeed he achieves his transcendence, a progressive dialectical episode. With his death, however, the dualities he has generated are rejoined.'²⁹ A reading of chapters 37 through 40 gives a clear sense of the multivocality of the text, and of the fact that the convention of a

narrating 'voice', or even of a number of narrating 'voices', is an ideological one posited upon the sanctity of individual consciousness, an ideology for which Ishmael's squeezing of the sperm acts as one possible critique.

Chapters 37 to 40 posit a formal resistance to the authoritarian ideal. In Chapter 37, 'Sunset', a solitary Ahab performs what is either a soliloquy or interior monologue; it is the rhetorical style which is striking, rather than what is actually said, and in the next few chapters the personal narrating voice is reduced to mere stage directions. Later in the novel, in his encounter with the ship's carpenter, Ahab speaks in a manner which is almost mock-heroic, so that the effect is not so much to convince us of Ahab's self-absorption but more crucially to alert us to the modes of literary discourse which Melville is deploying. The rhetorical effect is to remove the problem of identity beyond mere psychological characterizations of Ishmael and Ahab and into the realms of language and labour, because *Moby-Dick* constantly stresses that writing and speaking—placing oneself in history—are laborious tasks:

'Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-debtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free air; and I'm down in the whole world's books. I am so rich, I could have given bid for bid with the wealthiest Praetorians at the auction of the Roman empire (which was the world's); and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with. By heavens! I'll get a crucible, and into it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertebra. So.'

(MD, p.583)

In *Billy Budd, Sailor: An inside narrative*, his posthumously published novel, Melville reworks this historicizing impulse in his fiction, and the emphasis upon language and labour, and a different form of narrative emerges. As in *Moby-Dick*, the ideological subtext of all narrative is emphasized, and consequently the contingency of identity. If we are able to arrive at any definition of Billy's identity, it is one which engages specific political and aesthetic forms. Understandably, much critical analysis of this short novel has looked to its Christian symbolism or the quietism of the hero for indications as to its meanings; but I want to suggest that attention to the very concrete and historically-grounded discourse of the narrator produces a reading

of *Billy Budd* grounded in a material socio-economic and political reality, while permitting the literariness of the language to discount the possibility of closure.

An early pointer to the complex, yet highly visible, ideological world inhabited by Billy, Captain Vere, Claggart and the rest of the crew of the *Bellipotent* is Vere's estimate of Billy's value:

Captain Vere had from the beginning deemed Billy Budd to be what in the naval parlance of the time was called a 'King's bargain': that is to say, for His Britannic Majesty's navy a capital investment at small outlay or none at all.³⁰

Billy Budd may well be read as a Christian allegory, or as a discourse upon guilt and innocence, or as a dramatization of the concept of psychological doubles; it may be all or any of these things. Yet, what it most certainly is, above and before these other things, is a narrative fictionalization of the structures of imperialism and militarism; a structuration that determines Billy's identity, and the identity of every character in the book. Indeed, this story grounds any concept of identity not in individual presence alone, but in its interconnections with historical situation.

If we read closely the words quoted above, traces of different but interconnecting ideologies become apparent; 'Captain Vere had from the beginning deemed Billy Budd to be what in the naval parlance of the time was called a "King's bargain": that is to say, for His Britannic Majesty's navy a capital investment at small outlay or none at all' (*BB*, p.372). Not only is Captain Vere in the position to 'deem' Billy as he wishes, in other words to give him an identity, but the words following the colon specify the particular source of Vere's power; it is imperialist ('His Britannic Majesty's'), militarist ('navy'), and capitalist ('capital investment at small outlay or none at all'). This is not a mythical account of heroes and villains outside history, but a narrative drawing upon relationships of power and powerlessness, relationships which are in a very specific setting. It is crucial to any valuable reading of the story that the emphasis upon the historical world of the story is permitted full efficacy. It is

only within the contingencies of the matrix established by Melville that any identity for Billy can be formulated.

That this is a discourse, then, upon power and revolt needs to be established further, with close attention to the text. It would be a mistake to read a passage such as the following as if it were describing a *backdrop* to the story, merely a colourful setting, disconnected beyond the narrative:

It was the summer of 1797. In the April of that year had occurred the commotion at Spithead followed in May by a second and yet more serious outbreak in the fleet at the Nore. The latter is known, and without exaggeration in the epithet, as 'the Great Mutiny.' It was indeed a demonstration more menacing to England than the contemporary manifestoes and conquering and proselyting armies of the French Directory. To the British Empire the Nore Mutiny was what a strike in the fire brigade would be to London threatened by a general arson [...] the bluejackets, to be numbered by thousands, ran up with huzzas the British colors with the union and cross wiped out; by that cancellation transmuting the flag of founded law and freedom defined, into the enemy's red meteor of unbridled and unbounded revolt.

(BB, p.332)

The threat of mutiny, and its ability to change a symbol of established authority into one of radical opposition by a mere 'cancellation' of patterns, is here identified as the driving motivation behind the regimented discipline on board the ship. And Billy's identity is determined by his subordinate role in the Empire; he is a 'bluejacket', and is repeatedly referred to as such by the narrator. Billy's death buys regimented order aboard the *Bellipotent*; a sacrifice to deter 'unbridled and unbounded revolt'.

Melville has effectively foregrounded the historical actualities, making all within the story dependent upon these actualities; and this foregrounding is, it is signalled, deliberate: 'Like some other events in every age befalling states everywhere, including America, the Great Mutiny was of such character that national pride along with views of policy would fain shade it off into the historical background' (BB, p.333). This last quote is both an announcement that 'the Great Mutiny', and its political reverberations, are foregrounded, and an insistence that history is itself

constructed and not a natural or apolitical given. History, Melville suggests, is produced not discovered. History is a narrative and therefore necessarily conditioned by ideology and circumstance; and narratives are likewise histories. As '*an inside narrative*', this story establishes a world of inescapable effect where political considerations give form to human identity; it foregrounds the machinations of the imperial-military project, and mediates those impulses which have otherwise been shaded off.

Throughout the narrative, connections are established between what would normally be termed individual personality and socialized actions of the crew; and these connections are irretrievably bound up in the military and imperialist hegemony over the world of the story. It is with the self-serving logic of a slave-trader, that the narrator, however ironically, defends the practice of press-ganging:

Impressment, for one thing, went on. By custom sanctioned for centuries, and judicially maintained by a Lord Chancellor as late as Mansfield, that mode of manning the fleet, a mode now fallen into a sort of abeyance but never formally renounced, it was not practicable to give up in those years. Its abrogation would have crippled the indispensable fleet, one wholly under canvas, no steam power, its innumerable sails and thousands of cannon, everything in short, worked by muscle alone; a fleet the more insatiate in demand for men, because then multiplying its ships of all grades against contingencies present and to come of the convulsed Continent.

(BB, p.337)

It is tempting to read this as an expression of Melville's personal opinion; to equate this rationalization of the practice of press-ganging with such liberal apologists for the slave-trade as Francis Jeffrey who in 1820, while condemning slavery as a 'foul blot' on America's character, in the same article sought to defend slavery in the British West Indies, because:

Though nobody can regret more than we do the domestic slavery of our West India islands, it is quite absurd to represent the difficulties of the abolition as at all parallel in the case of America. It is still confidently asserted that, without slaves, those Islands could not be maintained; and,

independent of private interests, the trade of England cannot afford to part with them.³¹

George Dekker, for example, seems too willing to read the above passage from *Billy Budd* as a direct expression of Melville's personal opinion: 'Melville is at pains to explain that, however distasteful to men like Edward Vere, impressment was necessary in 1797 because military sailing ships required great numbers of seamen and Britain required great numbers of military sailing ships for her survival'.³² Reading narrative exposition as an author's personal beliefs is always problematical, and more so when applied to a text as discursively and formally complex as *Billy Budd*. Such a reductive equation depends upon a fallacious division of the text into distinct areas of opinion and plot; whereas, a text of *Billy Budd*'s difficulty demands a willingness to permit the structurations and ambivalences of the narrative to open up rather than close off interpretations. If the narrator's commentary is read as direct expression of Melville's personal opinion, then the novel itself is reduced to unmediated ideology, and the self-reflexivity of its literariness is elided. I would agree with Peter Bellis that 'despite its tautness and economy of construction [*Billy Budd*...] resists any clear and fully determinate reading.'³³

Billy Budd's interrogation of the authoritarian 'necessities' of naval war, is manifested in a later passage, regarding the ship's chaplain:

Marvel not that having been made acquainted with the young sailor's essential innocence the worthy man lifted not a finger to avert the doom of such a martyr to martial discipline. So to do would not only have been as idle as invoking the desert, but would also have been an audacious transgression of the bounds of his function, one as exactly prescribed to him by military law as that of the boatswain or any other naval officer. Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War—Mars. As such, he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar at Christmas. Why, then, is he there? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon; because too he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute Force.

(*BB*, pp.398-9)

Like Billy or Vere, the chaplain's identity is formed by contingent facts; he has a 'function' to fulfill and that is all he is within the imperialist world of naval law. And far from being 'necessary', this function is brutal and anti-Christian; contradictory in the terms of its own ideology.

Billy Budd examines forms, and functions within systems; it is not, I would argue, concerned with such humanistic vagaries as what is 'distasteful to men like Edward Vere'. There is a danger of wallowing in moral semantics, which are ultimately untestable, certainly in any literary way, if too much attention is given to the dilemmas of responsibility falling upon individual military officers, and this is where Dekker's assessment has limited validity as *literary* criticism. I find the following lines to be of an almost meaningless banality:

Melville repeatedly warns us how risky and presumptuous it is to second-guess the judgments passed in those remote times. On the one hand, he insists that, perhaps contrary to appearances, commanders like Vere were right and rational, after the mutinies at Spithead and Nore, to fear recurrences of trouble aboard their own ships. On the other, he reminds us armchair captains that, when men in Vere's position acted in error, they often did so because all their military experience taught them that in an emergency prompt and decisive action—almost any action—was better than delay.³⁴

Leaving aside the specious phrase 'Melville repeatedly warns us [...]', or the generalization 'us armchair captains', it is the seemingly naive, yet ideologically-loaded, use of such words as 'trouble', 'right' and 'emergency' which renders this last reading simultaneously both vague and presumptuous. Even were Dekker's pronouncement's upon Melville's personal opinion accurate, it is worth turning to Frederic Jameson for a relevant counterpoint; Jameson asks, concerning *Lord Jim*, 'why we should be expected to assume, in the midst of capitalism, that the aesthetic rehearsal of the problematics of a social value from a quite different mode of production—the feudal ideology of honor—should need no justification and should be expected to be of interest to us.'³⁵

Far from being a simple Christian parable, or an allegorical tale of good and evil, *Billy Budd* is grounded in historical events and practices; it is evident that Billy dies the way he does *because of* the ideological system which he inhabits, and by which he is exploited. There is a determined anti-heroism to this narrative, with the reader kept aware that Billy is just one among thousands of similarly maltreated 'bluejackets', and we notice that Billy identifies with the whipped sailor, who in his turn seeks to be consumed in the faceless mob: 'When Billy saw the culprit's naked back under the scourge, gridironed with red welts and worse, when he marked the dire expression in the liberated man's face as with his woolen shirt flung over him he rushed from the spot to bury himself in the crowd, Billy was horrified' (*BB*, p.346). The crowd protects, but it is also the site of the erasure of the individual, his burial.

The narrative is structured around the contradictions inherent in ideological formulations. The previous quoted long passage, 'impressment, for one thing[...]', exemplifies this connected doubleness, the working of language and other systems against themselves: so, whereas exploitation and forced labour are clearly depicted as the driving engine of imperialist expansion, it is equally apparent that in order to survive, this policy actually destroys the men it relies upon—'it worked by muscle alone'. There is an analogy here which I feel goes to the very heart of Melville's literary craft in *Billy Budd*: imperialism needs forced labour in order to fulfil its military requirements, but by the use of 'impressing' it necessarily alienates that labour, and subsequently needs to police the labour—for example, by having officers stand behind the gunners with swords, in case the latter should decide to use the cannon against their own ship—which will eventually lead to further tensions, and so on; in the plot of *Billy Budd* itself, Captain Vere, to warn off any nascent mutiny, executes Billy, but this act in itself threatens to stir up mutiny. The contradictions are explicit, and a certain fatalism enters the story, not a fatalism of predetermined action, but one of unstoppable conflict; it is not inevitable that Billy will be executed, but the hierarchical and exploitative system of imperial naval command determines that any conflict, such as an officer telling a lie about a sailor, will give rise to further conflict. Edward Said's study of the interconnectedness of *Culture and Imperialism*,

points to the grounding of such conflicts within the repressive but ultimately contradictory practices of the dominant ideology: 'those people compelled by the system to play subordinate or imprisoning roles within it emerge as conscious antagonists, disrupting it, proposing claims, advancing arguments'.³⁶

In Chapter 27, links between literary irony and ideological contradictions is made through reference to *forms*. In the account of the goings-on aboard the ship following Billy's burial at sea, the words of Captain Vere and the narrator support each other in their interpretation of the nature of power and symbols:

The drumbeat dissolved the multitude, distributing most of them along the batteries of the two covered gun decks. There, as wonted, the guns' crews stood by their respective cannon erect and silent. In due course the first officer, sword under arm and standing in his place on the quarter-deck, formally received the successive reports of the sworded lieutenants commanding the sections of the batteries below; the last of which reports being made, the summed report he delivered with the customary salute to the commander. All this occupied time, which in the present case was the object in beating to quarters at an hour prior to the customary one. That such variance from usage was authorized by an officer like Captain Vere, a martinet as some deemed him, was evidence of the necessity for unusual action implied in what he deemed to be temporarily the mood of the men. 'With mankind,' he would say, 'forms, measured forms, are everything; and this is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.' And this he once applied to the disruption of forms going on across the Channel and the consequences thereof.

(BB, p.404)

The emphasis is upon habit and the importance of forms; not only do 'forms' provide identity, a feeling of stability, and a sense of presence, however illusory, they are also the determining factor in all types of representation, including ideological or literary. In this passage, the control of forms is in the hands of the naval officers; time is 'occupied' by sending each member of the gun crew to 'their respective cannon', with 'the first officer, sword under arm, and standing in his place' '*formally*' (emphasis mine) receiving 'the successive reports of the sworded lieutenants.' This is a world in which signs are recognized as mediating forms of power and control. The essential threat of the French Revolution, for Vere, is its

disruption of accepted forms. And if we further reconsider Ahab's alleged understanding of the nature of political symbolism, of 'forms' and 'usage', then a concordance can be made between the 'rational' Vere and 'mad' Ahab:

Even captain Ahab was by no means unobservant of the paramount forms and usages of the sea.

Nor, perhaps, will it fail to be eventually perceived, that behind those forms and usages, as it were, he sometimes masked himself; incidentally making use of them for other and more private ends than they were legitimately intended to subserve. That certain sultanism of his brain, which had otherwise in a good degree remained unmanifested; through those forms that same sultanism became incarnate in an irresistible dictatorship. For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base.

(MD, p.244)

Chapter 28 opens with the lines: 'The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial' (BB, p.405). Formal symmetry is here posited as a product of 'pure fiction' or 'fable', and the implication is that the 'measured forms' demanded by Captain Vere are themselves a kind of fiction, in that they repress and obscure facts; we might gloss this as meaning that ideologies promote mystification rather than concreteness. But, nevertheless, it is the British Empire's measured forms which exercise hegemony over the world of *Billy Budd*, and all identity within that world is contingent upon the imperialist project. Like the *Pequod*, the *Bellipotent* is 'a feudal structure that oppresses the common sailor under a heavy weight of aristocratic privilege.'³⁷

In the social world of the story, what stands against this hegemony is the crew of the ship, for which the stuttering and martyred Billy is a textual symbol. Similarly, the literariness of Melville's writing forestalls any reductive interpretation or rationalization of the writing; what has often been read as obscuring ambiguity in

much of Melville's work can be more usefully understood as an attempt to signify the limitations of language. The white whale of *Moby Dick* is beyond reading, beyond identity and, so, ironically open to Ahab's ideological reading; it is this confrontation with apparent meaninglessness which strangely gives Melville's greatest writing its articulateness. In *Billy Budd* the crew of the *Bellipotent* signify a dynamic beyond the boundaries of ordered discourse:

This emphasized silence was gradually disturbed by a sound not easily to be verbally rendered. Whoever has heard the freshet-wave of a torrent suddenly swelled by pouring showers in tropical mountains, showers not shared by the plain; whoever has heard the first muffled murmur of its sloping advance through precipitous woods may form some conception of the sound now heard. The seeming remoteness of its source was because of its murmurous indistinctness, since it came from close by, even from the men massed on the ship's open deck. Being inarticulate, it was dubious in significance further than it seemed to indicate some capricious revulsion of thought or feeling such as mobs ashore are liable to, in the present instance possibly implying a sullen revocation on the men's part of their involuntary echoing of Billy's benediction. But ere the murmur had time to wax into clamour it was met by a strategic command, the more telling that it came with abrupt unexpectedness: 'Pipe down the starboard watch, Boatswain, and see that they go.'

(*BB*, pp.402-403)

The 'men' have only an ill-defined 'murmur', whereas empire and navy have a 'strategic command' to restore order. The discourse relies for its effect upon indeterminate phrases, which I have italicized. The "meaning" of the 'murmuring' noise, like the passage as a whole, is left unformulated and only hinted at, like the voices heard in the forest by Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': 'so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind'.³⁸

It is within this world of contending articulations that Billy is defined. Billy's inability to defend himself against Claggart's accusations is a causal factor in the deaths of both men, he is without a voice when Vere demands he defend himself, and the particular words used to describe this scene indicate the emphasis which is to be placed upon Billy's subordinate role within the hierarchy of the ship:

‘Speak, man!’ said Captain Vere to the transfixed one, struck by his aspect even more than by Claggart’s. ‘Speak! Defend yourself!’ Which appeal caused but a strange dumb gesturing and gurgling in Billy; amazement at such an accusation so suddenly sprung on inexperienced nonage; this, and, it may be, horror of the accuser’s eyes, serving to bring out his lurking defect and in this instance for the time intensifying it into a convulsed tongue-tie; while the intent head and entire form straining forward in an agony of ineffectual eagerness to obey the injunction to speak and defend himself, gave an expression to the face like that of a condemned vestal priestess in the moment of being buried alive, and in the first struggle against suffocation.

(BB, p.376)

Vere’s ‘appeal’ becomes an ‘injunction to speak’, so Billy’s ‘strange dumb gesturing’ must be read not just as an inability, brought on by ‘amazement’, to respond to Claggart’s accusation, but equally as an inability to obey an order, the primary code of conduct aboard a military ship where every sailor ‘is accustomed to obey orders without debating them; his life afloat is externally ruled for him’ (BB, p.364). To some extent then Billy’s inability to follow an order, to obey another’s vocal presence, results in his death. His inarticulateness at this moment within the narrative is not, however, a discretely separable moment of crisis, divorced from the rest of the narrative. For Billy, language is ‘only another form of entrapment’;³⁹ his lack of ‘voice’ confirms his lack of presence generally. Billy’s speechlessness is his ‘whiteness’.

Billy acts, in various ways, as a cipher within his own story; like the white whale, he symbolizes what others wish him to symbolize, conforming to their reading of the world. The Dane’s belief in plots, Vere’s sense of honour and the existence of innate goodness, Claggart’s misanthropy; each of these finds proof in Billy Budd, the commodified ‘King’s bargain’. When he is first taken aboard the *Bellipotent*, leaving behind his previous vessel, the merchant ship *Rights-of-Man*, Billy asserts his lack of origin:

Asked by the officer, a small, brisk little gentleman as it chanced, among other questions, his place of birth, he replied, ‘Please, sir, I don’t know.’
‘Don’t know where you were born? Who was your father?’

Not only is Billy ignorant as to his past, he is unaware of his present as we are told that ‘of self-consciousness he seemed to have little or none, or about as much as we may reasonably impute to a dog of Saint Bernard’s breed’ (BB, p.330). Importantly, Billy is likened to Georgiana, the wife of the scientist Aylmer in Hawthorne’s short story ‘The Birthmark’: ‘though our Handsome Sailor had as much of masculine beauty as one can expect anywhere to see; nevertheless, like the beautiful woman in one of Hawthorne’s minor tales, there was just one thing amiss in him. No visible blemish indeed, as with the lady; no, but an occasional liability to a vocal defect’ (BB, p.331). Like Georgiana, Billy is objectified as something in which others invest their desires and fears, and his ‘vocal defect’ and ‘masculine beauty’ are each read by others as symbols, in much the same way as Georgiana’s birthmark is read by her husband: ‘selecting it as a symbol of his wife’s liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer’s sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birth-mark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana’s beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight’.⁴⁰ Melville’s cross-referencing with his friend’s writing grounds the narrative in the literary and symbolic, as well as the historical mode.

It is *the* authority aboard the *Bellipotent*, Captain Vere, who consistently exerts his authority through his readings of other characters throughout Melville’s story; Vere’s judgments are Godlike because they are mysterious. His innate understanding of Billy’s ‘goodness’ is matched by his apprehension of Claggart’s ‘evil’: ‘something even in the official’s self-possessed and somewhat ostentatious manner in making his specifications strangely reminded him of a bandsman, a perjurous witness in a capital case before a courtmartial ashore of which when a lieutenant he (Captain Vere) had been a member’ (BB, p.371). Vere is quick to interpret and judge in his private sphere, naming Claggart as a liar because of ‘something’ in the latter’s manner which ‘strangely’ remind him of a previous liar he had known. Likewise, although with an opposite conclusion, Captain Vere sees Billy as a biological and erotic object, and so

‘though in general not very demonstrative to his officers, he had congratulated Lieutenant Ratcliffe upon his good fortune in lighting on such a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might have posed for a statue of a young Adam before the Fall’ (BB, p.372).

Vere’s power is equated with that of a puritan evangelist, being similarly grounded in the rhetoric of inevitability; whether the inevitability of military discipline or of predestination. And with both ideologies, the necessary answer from those it enthralls is the same: silence. ‘Their captain’s announcement was listened to by the throng of standing sailors in a dumbness like that of a seated congregation of believers in hell listening to the clergyman’s announcement of his Calvinistic text’ (BB, p.349); no answer is permissible. The voice of authority achieves dominance through the silence it invokes in others: authority is, by definition, singular and its contradictions concealed.

The ‘voice’ of the narrator, at least, is one which we might assume would match that of Vere for authority, and indeed it does have an assertively self-conscious presence. However, the removal of the cloak of authorial omniscience which this baring of the narrative voice might entail is itself problematized by an ironic insistence upon the veracity of the tale. Referring to Billy’s stutter, the narrator claims that ‘the avowal of such an imperfection in the Handsome Sailor should be evidence not alone that he is not presented as a conventional hero, but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance’ (BB, p.332). Like the earlier reference to Hawthorne, the deliberately literary nature of the sentence is noticeable, involving the reader in a paradoxical reading: the aesthetic practice of character presentation is foregrounded, while at the same time fictionality, or romance, is denied. An even more direct claim for the story as ‘fact’ is made later on in the narrative, and this connects immediately with the question of identity as it is mediated in the story:

Now to invent something touching the more private career of Claggart, something involving Billy Budd, of which something the latter should be wholly ignorant, some romantic incident implying that Claggart’s knowledge of the young bluejacket began at some period anterior to

catching sight of him on board the seventy-four—all this, not so difficult to do, might avail in a way more or less interesting to account for whatever of enigma may appear to lurk in the case. But in fact there was nothing of the sort.

(*BB*, p.351)

What appears to be a straightforward refusal to indulge in the ‘romance’ of explanations nevertheless indicates a refusal to elucidate upon what ‘in fact’ there was; the idea of an ‘enigma’ is left at the centre of the narrative strategy of the story, and it is an enigma which the narrative voice directly and purposively creates. The narrator, moreover, stresses his own omniscience while at the same time denying the fictionality of his tale. We are told that Claggart has ‘no power to annul the elemental evil within him’ leaving him merely to ‘act out the part allotted’(*BB*, p.356); yet in Melville’s writing, as in the writing of few other authors, fatalism is ironically undermined by linguistic indeterminacy, while humanistic concepts of morality, character and plot are problematized. Much of the difficulty in settling upon a univocal reading of *Billy Budd* comes from this contradictory narrative voice, and its simultaneous implications: ‘I know everything and I know nothing’ about the ‘facts’.

When we read, concerning Claggart, that ‘to pass from a normal nature to him one must cross “the deadly space between.” And this is best done by indirection’, and then get embroiled in an abstract explanation beginning ‘Long ago an honest scholar, my senior, said to me in reference to one who like himself is now no more, a man so unimpeachably respectable that against him nothing was ever openly said though among the few something was whispered’, we are left wondering just exactly what the ‘deadly space’ might be (*BB*, p.352). It might be madness, conjecture, abstraction; but why is it ‘deadly’? It might be that the very nature of narrative is endangered by such a gap as the narrator insists exists between the reader’s ‘normal’ sensibilities’ and the ‘elemental evil’ of Claggart. Certainly, if we attempt to read the phrase in line with its meaning in the military eulogy from which Melville gleaned it, we are baffled, because there it refers to the physical space between warring ships.⁴¹ All we can say is that for all the narrative insistence upon the ‘facts’ and the desire to

put the record straight as to 'what manner of men respectively were John Claggart and Billy Budd' (*BB*, p.407), *Billy Budd* is a novel both of ambiguity and historicity.

Raman Selden has written that 'first, literary texts, especially the most innovative, lack the specious unity of ideology, and secondly, they produce a space in which ideological elements collide in uneven and unresolvable conflict, contradiction and difference'.⁴² In *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd* identity is foregrounded as a problem in the narrative. While, for example, we are *told* that Billy is 'good' and Claggart is 'evil', we are also made aware of the determining power of ideology in the construction of all identities, narrative or otherwise. And *Billy Budd*, no less than *Moby-Dick*, interrogates the ways in which 'the material and the substantial qualities of things as things are hidden beneath their status as commodities';⁴³ or, we might propose, 'the status of people as people'.

These texts are mapped out upon vectors of capitalist and imperialist-militarist history, the actions of 'these pirates of the sphere'—and it is upon this ground that Melville's narrative art is practised; a sense of historical actuality is created alongside powerful suggestions regarding the overdeterminations of meaning, the paradoxical 'spaces' surrounding any attempts at interpretation. 'Each event, each object needs to be allowed the space of its ambiguities';⁴⁴ and it is the location and production of the material of history through the ambiguities of discourse which gives both *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd* a hold on the particular problematic of identity.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, edited by Walter Bezanson (New York, 1960), p.434.
2. C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The story of Herman Melville and the world we live in* (London, 1985), p.47.
3. C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p.23.
4. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, edited with an introduction by Harold Beaver (1972; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1986), p.540. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *MD*.
5. Paul Royster, 'Melville's Economy of Language', in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (1986; rpt. Cambridge, 1994), pp.313-336 (p.318).
6. Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, 1989), p.58.
7. *The Writings of Herman Melville*, edited by Harrison Hayford, and others, Northwestern-Newberry Edition, 15 vols (Evanston, Ill., and Chicago 1968—), XIV, *Correspondence*, (1993), p.107.
8. *The Writings of Herman Melville*, XIV, pp.190-1.
9. Stephen Fender, *Sea Changes: British Emigration & American Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), p.97.
10. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (1976; rpt. London, 1986), p.81.
In *Sea Changes*, Stephen Fender makes an interesting point so far as this thesis is concerned: 'It was Dr. Benjamin Rush, educated at Edinburgh University, who gave Paine's book its title, wishing perhaps to insinuate some consanguinity with the contemporary (and fashionable) Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Paine wanted to call it "Plain Truth"', (p.101).
11. [Henry W.Bellows], 'The Influence of the Trading Spirit upon the Social and Moral Life of America', in *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology*, edited by David Brion Davis (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1979), pp.111-114 (p.112).

12. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by William Charvat and others (Columbus, Ohio, 1962-), x, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1974), p.6.

13. Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, introduced by Douglas Jerold, Everyman edition (1912; rpt. London, 1966), p.141, p.179.

14. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited by J.P. Mayer and translated by George Lawrence, thirteenth edition (1966; rpt. London, 1994), p.403.

15. Stephen Fender, *Sea Changes*, p.13.

Fender's thesis is: 'repeatedly the proponents of a distinctly American literature, from Emerson and Whitman to William Carlos Williams, sought to establish their national cultural projects in words and arguments drawn from the rhetoric of emigration. The settlers' material nature became the poets' native materials. Like the settler, the poet answered the felt lack of American quality with an endless profusion of American quantity, thus valorizing the ideas of process and the material. The self-interrogating narrative that never comes to rest on a final, determinate interpretation, and the long poem that never ends, and also remains open to chance material encounters along its way, fashioned the emigrants rhetoric of process into the two distinctive American literary inventions' (pp.12-13).

While right to point to these forms of writing as being prevalent in American literature, the emphasis Fender places on 'emigrants rhetoric' and on America's power for 'invention' is more questionable. He would need to explain how, for example, a Scottish shepherd wrote one of the greatest 'self-interrogating narratives', James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), before Melville had even been heard of.

16. 'The Declaration of Independence', in *American Literature in Context: 1620-1830*, Stephen Fender (London, 1983), pp.97-100 (p.97).

17. Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, p.111.

18. Quoted by Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (1985; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1990), p.54.

19. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; rpt. London, 1983), p.19.

20. Paul Royster, 'Melville's Economy of Language', p.319.

21. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, edited by R.E. Allen, eighth edition (Oxford, 1990) has its first entry for the adjective 'white' as: 'resembling a surface reflecting sunlight without absorbing any of the visible rays'. This would match the whale's 'visible absence of colour'.

22. Peter J. Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves: Identity and Textual Form in the Novels of Herman Melville* (Philadelphia, 1990), p.124.
23. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, March of America Facsimile Series, No. 100 (Ann Arbor, 1966).
24. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, pp.209-10, p.207.
25. Quoted in Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America*, p.305. Brogan writes: "'Manifest Destiny' was a phrase launched by the Democratic journalist, John L. O'Sullivan, [...] in 1845'.
26. Quoted in Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York, 1980), p.130.
27. *The Writings of Herman Melville*, XIV, *Correspondence*, p.190.
28. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.224.
29. Myra Jehlen, 'The Novel and the Middle Class in America', in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, pp.125-144, (p.132).
30. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor, and other stories*, edited with an introduction by Harold Beaver (1967; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1976), p.372. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *BB*.
31. Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1853). Jeffrey effectively, if inadvertently, exposes the superficiality and relativity of Whig and liberal commitments to 'freedom'. Not surprisingly, despite the hand-wringing—'nobody can regret more than we do'—the economic imperative is paramount.
32. George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge, 1987), p.208.
33. Peter J. Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, p.187.
34. George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, p.209.
35. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.217.
36. Edward Said, *Culture & Imperialism* (1993; rpt. London, 1994), p.406.
37. Wyn Kelly, *Melville's City: Literary and Urban Form in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Cambridge, 1996), p.172.
38. *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, edited by James McIntosh, Norton Critical Editions (New York, 1987), pp.70-71.
39. Peter J. Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, p.188.

40. *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, ed. by James McIntosh, p.120.
41. Thomas Campbell, 'The Battle of the Baltic', in *Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale: and other poems* (London, 1809), pp.108-113.
42. Raman Selden, *Criticism and Objectivity* (London, 1984), pp.79-80.
43. Carolyn Porter, 'Reification and American Literature', in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, pp.188-217 (p.189).
44. John Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (London, 1992), p.215.

Chapter 3

The Kailyard's 'Place' in Scottish Literature

In the previous chapter, I looked at ways in which Herman Melville's writing located the construction of identity within social relations, and particularly relations of work and authority; I noted the interrogation of rhetorical and discursive forms of authority in two of his best-known fictions. In doing this, I rejected attempts to read *Moby-Dick* or *Billy Budd, Sailor* as analyses of individual 'characters', or as direct expressions of the author's personal beliefs. In this chapter, I want to develop further the question of whether the social determinants of literary writing are locatable within the text, and how they are expressed there. In particular, I will look at how the idea of identity—whether national, class, or individual—is mediated when the 'voice' of the narrator ironically disarticulates its own utterance, or establishes alterior readings of the social world of the text. In looking at the phenomenon of 'Kailyard' writing, we see the process by which narrative modes become generically grouped; once grouped they are more easily included in, or excluded from, any particular national literary canon.¹

In critical accounts of Scottish literature, no generic category has been as often, or as virulently, disparaged as the Kailyard stories and novels of the late nineteenth-century; and, when it is not the actual writings of the arch-Kailyarders Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett coming under attack, it is their pernicious 'influence' on twentieth-century cultural forms in Scotland.² If Walter Scott's historical fiction comes under attack for a middle-of-the-road 'moral laziness and mental cynicism',³ it is usually redeemed by the critic's aesthetic approval; Stevenson's writing might be 'shallow', but it is at least exciting and very Scottish; MacDiarmid's eccentricities (anglophobia, authoritarianism, didacticism) all go to make him more 'interesting' and dynamic, it seems. For the Kailyard, however, no justification, or mitigation is offered. It is simply bad writing, bad history, bad sociology. Above all, it seems, it is bad Scottishness.

All of these views, I argue, give insufficient consideration to the particular ideological formulations of the Kailyard; and, more generally, to dismiss the Kailyard is to fall for the normative critical approach in which individual texts have to conform to the critic's ideological expectations; in a sense, the perfect text already exists in the critic's mind, but unfortunately it just has not been written yet. At the end of this chapter, I hope to establish, by a close reading of J.M. Barrie's novella *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1931), the deconstruction of both Kailyard as a narrative form, and as an unproblematical critical term. *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* seems to me to be the most incisive critique of both the genre, and of its critics; and this incisiveness is grounded in the fact that Barrie is writing from within the genre itself. That story confronts the problematic of identity in its social form, rendering redundant the common psychologizing approach to 'ghost-stories', by calling attention to the materiality of the social sphere, and the necessary lacunae of textuality.

A principal factor in the sustained critical attacks upon Kailyard is the core-periphery paradigm itself. The binary polarity of core and periphery, or metropolitan and parochial, while having a useful dialectical function, sometimes lead to crude oversimplification in the 'placing' of literary texts. The 'parochialism' of the Kailyarders damned them in the eyes of some metropolitan London commentators; however, the very fact that they sought a metropolitan readership at which to direct their liberal-Christian sentimentalism has damned them even more in the eyes of critics looking for a distinctively Scottish literary tradition. The principal Kailyarders, Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett are in the invidious position of being damned for being on the one hand too Scottish, or, on the other, not Scottish enough. If "'Kailyard" can mean different things to different people',⁴ what it usually 'means' to the British literary critic—Scottish or English—is sentimentality and literary embarrassment.

In *The Unspeakable Scot* (1902), still perhaps the bitterest attack upon the Kailyarders, T.W.H. Crosland indulges in an unmediated polemic of bigotry.⁵

Crosland's main target is the Scot living in London, and the successful Kailyarders—successful in terms of readership numbers—are lampooned mercilessly. Of the fictional inhabitants of Barrie's Thrums, Crosland writes, 'for blithering sentiment of the cheapest and most obvious sort, these personages have certainly never been equalled'. And, to add insult to this imagined injury done to Crosland's intellect, the inhabitants of Maclaren's Drumtochty speak 'the most uncompromising dialect'.⁶ So bitter and prejudiced is Crosland's book that the narrowness of vision, or parochialism, seems, in fact, to be all his. It replicates the ideology of Johnson's *Tour* in the crudest way, without approaching Johnson's spirit of enquiry.

Alternatively, Scottish critics in the business of constructing a distinctively 'Scottish Tradition', for example George Blake in *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (1951), decry the Kailyard narrators for lingering 'round the bonnie brier bush, telling sweet, amusing little stories of bucolic intrigue as seen through the windows of the Presbyterian manse'.⁷ The obvious implication being that 'the windows of the Presbyterian manse' are an inappropriate perspective in which to ground a specifically Scottish subjectivity; whereas I would argue that the best Kailyard fiction uses the very fact of its 'parochialism' to engage in textual self-reflection. T.C. Smout, celebrated historian of the 'Scottish People', writes with similar contempt:

It was only after [Scott's] death that the Scottish novel sank up to its ankles in the mud of the kailyard [...]. His successors, after Lockhart, had none of his qualities, and their attempts to write historical novels about the rural past became more and more irrelevant to nineteenth-century Scotland as it turned into an industrial country whose problems did not once engage either the pens or the minds of her main writers.⁸

Ironically, the polarity of these judgements—the Kailyard as *too* Scottish, or not Scottish *enough*—suggests possibilities for the construction of a Scottish subjectivity, which is inclusive yet still socially and culturally specific. If Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls* (1889), for example, is both parochial *and* metropolitan—

depending on who is doing the defining—then what is problematized is the ideological construction of identity at the interstices of writing and reading, at the sites of textual production. For any literary tradition, whether based upon nationality, genre, or language has exclusion as a founding principle, perhaps more than, inclusion. I say ‘perhaps more than’, because the defenders of a tradition are exactly that—defenders guarding the gates. The most obvious and famous example of literary exclusivity, in the English language at least, is F.R. Leavis’s ‘Great Tradition’. Leavis’s naming of the four ‘Great’ ‘English’ novelists—of whom only two are native English—serves as a critical paradigm because its exclusivity is astonishing. For Scottish fiction, such exclusion has been practised upon the texts of the Kailyarders perhaps more than any other group of writers.

In his otherwise excellent study of *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, William Donaldson excludes Kailyard from the popular Scottish tradition: ‘it will in time, no doubt, take its place where it belongs: in the intellectual annals of England and the United States’ and, Donaldson opines, ‘the milieu of the Kailyarders was in any case noticeably bourgeois’; as if being both bourgeois *and* Scottish is a paradox.⁹ Donaldson is by no means a reactionary figure among Scottish critics, but here, like George Blake, he reproduces ‘the normative fallacy [in which] the work should be other than it is [...] corrected and effectively modified by continuous comparison with the model which has an independent, *a priori* existence.’¹⁰ For Donaldson, the ‘noticeably bourgeois’ kailyard genre can not be made to conform to his ‘popular’ working-class model; for Blake, it would not conform to his demand for urban realism.

To understand both the ideological and formal structures of the Kailyard, it is important to locate both its ideological place at the time of its production, and specific literary progenitors in Scotland; literary models suggesting both the essentially comic mode and the role of social commentary, which were to be two distinctive features of the best Kailyard writing. From this historical base, it might be possible to construct a reading of the Kailyard as a British, and specifically

imperialist, phenomenon. It is crucial to understand that the contradiction of the Kailyard—its simultaneous parochialism and metropolitanism—is constitutive of its place in the artistic and ideological world of nineteenth-century Britain. The Kailyard is both Scottish *and* British: its necessary state-of-being in a contradictory capitalist nation-state.

James Leatham's contention that John Galt was 'the First of the Kailyarders' can hardly lead to any great disagreement, other than to question Leatham's use of the word 'First', carrying as it does connotations of immaculate conception and ahistorical genesis. This reservation aside, Leatham offers a cogent definition of what exactly 'a Kailyarder' is. Firstly, he argues, the Kailyarder—we might prefer to say the Kailyard text—is concerned 'with the old-fashioned life of the village or small town';¹¹ that is, Kailyard fiction is interested in the non-metropolitan past. Secondly, that 'the characters should be devoid of humour is an essential condition of the characterization. That is what the author means'.¹²

Leatham's definitions seem to me to offer a good way into an understanding of the Kailyard in its formulation of direct social commentary and its emphasis upon the opacity of narrative. Consequently, we can read Kailyard as historically-grounded specific yet multi-determined in its textuality. Kailyard fiction engages with the past, with 'old-fashioned life', in ways which illuminate both the social modalities of their composition and publication and those of our own historical age; and, the lack of self-irony amongst the characters in the narratives exposes the constructedness of identity and the instability of subjectivity. These twin concerns for both the socio-historical reflection and narrative refraction are present not only in Galt's writing, but also in *The Life of Mansie Wauch: Tailor in Dalkeith*, the best-known work of the man Leatham called Galt's 'best imitator', D.M. Moir.

Moir's novel was first published as a complete book in 1828, having originally appeared as a serial in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. It is certainly interested in political and social change and it manifests a clear awareness of the problematic of

literary subjectivity. The narrator, Mansie, is at times naive ingenue, and at other times knowing observer.

Towards the beginning of the book, in a passage of powerful intensity, Mansie relates the difference he felt between the city of Edinburgh and his home-town of Dalkeith—the distance in miles is approximately twenty miles, but Mansie's perception of the distance is much greater. And, importantly, his perception is very much grounded in his sense of his own identity as a rural Scot, and of a strange and distressing alienation in Edinburgh, where Manise feels like an outsider in his own country:

The change from our own town, where every face was friendly, and where I could ken every man I saw, by the cut of his coat, at half-a-mile's distance, to the bum and bustle of the High Street, the tremendous cannons of the Castle, packed full of soldiers ready for war, and the filthy, ill-smelling abominations of the Cowgate, where I put up, was almost more than could be tholed by man of woman born. My lodging was up six pair of stairs, in a room of Widow Randie's, which I rented for half-a-crown a-week, coals included; and many a time, after putting out my candle, before stepping into my bed, I used to look out at the window, where I could see thousands and thousands of lamps, spreading for miles adown streets and through squares, where I did not know a living soul; and dreeing the awful and insignificant sense of being a lonely stranger in a foreign land.

(*MW*, p.26)

This passage is specifically expressive of the paradox of the individual feeling isolated within the city. Despite being near other people, Mansie is alienated by the 'bum and bustle', so that 'despite' can become 'because of'. Jeremy Hawthorn has written of the specific and 'complex symbolism of the contemporary city, with its secrecies and compartmentalizations alongside its collectivities and thronging "public"',¹⁴ and it is such a symbolism which Moir employs here.

Even more crucial, for this thesis, than the general alienation of the individual in the city is the fact that Scotland, and its capital city no less, become a 'foreign land' in which Mansie is 'a lonely stranger'. The 'thousands and thousands of lamps'

observed from his bedroom window serve only to illuminate the community from which Mansie is excluded. Reading himself as 'insignificant', Mansie defines the anxiety of the 'peripheral' when subject to the hegemonic social constructs of the 'core'. Edinburgh, the peripheral in Britain, is at the core in Scotland. Mansie's longing for 'our own town', and the realization that *national* identity is a mere abstraction in the face of the materiality of 'the filthy, ill-smelling abominations of the Cowgate', establish a core-periphery paradigm in this single sentence.

In reminiscing about 'our own town', Mansie draws the contrast between Edinburgh and 'pleasant Dalkeith! ay, how different, with its bonny river Esk, its gardens full of gooseberry bushes and pear-trees, its grass parks spotted with sheep, and its grand green woods, from the bullying blackguards, the comfortless reek, and the nasty gutters of the Netherbow' (*MW*, p.26). This remembered—or reconstructed—pastoral idyll, seemingly existing for the pleasure of the gazing human subject, is markedly different to the terrors of Mansie's childhood, experienced in that very same Dalkeith. As a child, Mansie is punished by the local butcher for his mischief, but his punishment is more an act of vicious cruelty than a reasonable act of chastisement. The butcher, we are told:

Flang me like a pair of old boots into his booth, where I landed on my knees upon a raw bloody calf's skin. I thought I would have gone out of my wits, when I heard the door locked upon me, and looked round me in such an unearthly place[...]. The floor was all covered with lapped blood, and sheep and calf skins. The calves and the sheep themselves, with their cuttit throats, and glazed een, and ghastly girning faces, were hanging about on pins, heels uppermost. Losh me! I thought on Bluebeard and his wives in the bloody chamber!

And all the time it was growing darker and darker, and more dreary; and all was as quiet as death itself. It looked, by all the world, like a grave, and me buried alive within it; til the rottens came out of their holes to lick the blood, and whisked about like wee evil spirits.

(*MW*, p.24)

A literary analogy for this would not be sentimental pastoral so much as Charlotte Brontë's account of Jane Eyre's confinement in 'the Red Room'. The child Mansie recognizes in himself an affinity with the slaughtered lambs and calves, and the

visceral language mediates for the distanced reader the actualities of animal butchery. Of course it is important to recognize that for Mansie, Edinburgh is a fully realized version of this 'darker and darker' place of his childhood. The words 'I thought I would have gone out of my wits' are echoed in the account of Edinburgh: 'It was an awful business; dog on it, I ay wonder yet how I got through with it. There was no rest for soul or body by night or day, with police-officers crying, "One o'clock, an' a frosty morning," knocking Eirishmen's teeth down their throats with their battons [...]. To me it was a real hell upon earth' (MW, p.28).

In that penultimate sentence, there are traces of the text's interrogation of identity, particularly national identity. Mansie's contradictory feelings of Scottishness and alienation in Edinburgh are reproduced in the various textual references to the British nation-state and the various nationalities comprising that state. Moreover, the different linguistic registers in the novel are material evidence of the anxieties of nationhood of which *The Life of Mansie Wauch* is in part an expression. A linguistic hierarchy can be identified in the novel to support Susan Manning's contention that, in the wake of the Scottish Enlightenment, much Scottish—and American—literature of the nineteenth century was anxious as to its own parochialism and so sought to contrast the English dialect of the knowing and educated narrator with the Scots—or American—of the subordinate 'characters'. As Manning puts it, 'the standard medium necessarily subordinates the vernacular voice'.¹⁵ And indeed it is along such lines that Kailyard has been criticized for its tendency to patronize 'the natives'.

The various linguistic registers in which Mansie relates his tale are difficult to reconcile with a notion of narrative verisimilitude; however, if we read *Mansie Wauch* as an extended rhetorical performance, then it is not only freed from a simplistic reading of it as unmediated reality, but it makes available a fuller understanding of the ideological and formal tropes around which it is constructed. The Scots vernacular of 'Flang me' and 'glazed een' is most starkly contrasted with the language Mansie employs in his most abstractly philosophical passages such as,

‘pleasure is the focus, which it is the common aim to approximate; and the mass is guided by a sort of unpremeditated social compact, which draws them out of doors as soon as meals are discussed, with a sincere thirst of amusement’ (*MW*, p.65).

Elizabeth Robson reads the linguistic variations of this novel as a mark of the contest between the Scots and English languages. Tracing the various editorial ‘states’ of *The Life of Mansie Wauch*, Robson claims that the ongoing process of Anglicization is responsible for the final version of the novel. And, she argues, the reason for this Anglicization is plain enough:

It is at once apparent that ‘Mansie’ is another proof, if proof were needed, of the tendency visible in so many writers of Scots from Burns and Sir Walter onwards, to anglicize their language progressively until only so much Scots is left as is necessary to impart its flavour to the English.¹⁶

Robson’s point is fair enough, and especially of concern in critiquing the centripetal force of the English ‘core’ culture. However, reading *Mansie Wauch* in a fuller context—as a commodified product of the burgeoning British Empire, grounded in the ideology of the capitalist nation-state—then the ideological and discursive implication of the various linguistic registers stands alongside the desire of the individual writer or publisher, for economic reasons, to address an ‘English’ readership. The different ‘voices’ of *Mansie Wauch* are symptomatic of the constructedness of identity; and there are passages in the novel in which the full contradictory panoply of assertive cultural independence and imperialist agglomeration are brilliantly played out. Both nationalist and capitalist ideologies are reproduced in the following passage:

It was about the month of March, in the year of grace *anno Domini* eighteen hundred, that the whole country trembled, like a giant ill of the ague, under the consternation of Buonaparte, and all the French vagabonds emigrating over, and landing in the Firth [...] yet [...] I, for one, kept up my pluck, like a true Highlander. Does any living soul believe that Scotland—the land of the Tweed, and the Clyde, and the Tay—could be conquered, and the like of us sold, like Egyptian slaves, into captivity? Fie, fie—I despise such haivers. Are we not descended, father and son, from Robert Bruce and Sir William Wallace, having the

bright blood of freemen in our veins, and the Pentland Hills, as well as our own dear homes and firesides, to fight for?

[...]. We were ever the free British; and before we would say to Frenchmen that we were their humble servants, we would either twist the very noses off their faces, or perish in the glorious struggle.

[...]. One thing, howsoever, I trust I ken, and that is, my duty to my King as his loyal subject, to old Scotland as her unworthy son, and to my family as their prop, support, and breadwinner'

(*MW*, pp.198-199)

This is identity in the process of construction. Britishness and Scottishness are not presented as contending but as part of the one identity, as in Macpherson's Ossianic poems and Scott's novels. The various stereotypes which the passage adumbrates — the plucky 'true Highlander', the independent Scot, the 'free British'—are all integral parts of a dominant concern of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British culture, that of constructing a national narrative and imagining a national character which incorporated the imperial state of Britain. As honorary Highlander, Lowland Scot and loyal Briton, Mansie Wauch personifies the good British subject. With the words 'we were ever the free British', Mansie Wauch signs himself up to the British project. The contradictions of these various ideological constructs are blended together into the 'character' of Mansie Wauch, conservative rural patriot. In looking to the British monarchist state and the family unit for his values, Mansie represents a convergence of the feudal and the capitalist.

The anxieties caused by the French Revolution among Britain's ruling classes are well documented, and their manifestation in Scotland is particularly relevant to my thesis here. James Young has mapped out some lines of interconnection between the on-going industrialization—with its capitalist correlative—and the process of 'Anglicization'; if the elite spoke English, and the printing press was dominated by the English language then, argues Young, the 'lower orders' could be declared 'inarticulate'.¹⁷ The English language then is not so much an expression, or weapon, of straightforward English colonial rule as of capitalist-bourgeois hegemony; the English language becomes an imperialist, multi-national tool of control, divorced from any notion of an actual nation called 'England'. If, as Young asserts, 'English

capitalism and the Scottish Enlightenment were inseparably bound together',¹⁸ then what unites them is clearly not nationhood but economic class: the new state of Britain was above all else an economic one, founded for reasons of economic expediency, so it is perhaps stating the obvious to say that its elite class—the residual aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie—coalesced around economic interests first and foremost. But it is worth stating as the point is often lost amidst talk of 'Scottish nationalist' and 'Little Englander' mentalities. Robert Crawford argues that 'the attack on the distinctive Scottish cultural tradition was one mounted by Scots themselves', and in so far as this implies a class-based hegemony, with the English language as its discursive weapon, I would agree.¹⁹

Mansie Wauch, although himself far from being among the residual aristocracy or emergent town-based bourgeoisie, vocalizes the anti-republican anti-egalitarian concerns of the traditional conservative, and of course religious, rural classes. The Radicals, or 'agents of the Spirit of Darkness' as Mansie calls them, make their demands via bill-posters which Mansie mocks unreservedly:

Yet the business, though fearsome in the main, was in some parts almost laughable. Every thing was to be divided, and every one made alike; houses and lands were to be distributed by lot; and the mighty man and the beggar—the auld man and the hobble-de-hoy—the industrious man and the spendthrift—the maimed, the cripple, and the blind, the clever man of business and the haveril simpleton, made all just brethren, and alike. Save us! but to think of such nonsense!!

(*MW*, pp.76-7)

Mansie's rhetoric ironizes itself by its own self-absorption. Although I think it likely, taking into consideration the overall characterization of Mansie, that some irony is intended by Moir, no contributor to *Blackwood's* can feasibly be aligned with the Radicals. However, Moir's intention is irrelevant here because it is manifestly not 'laughable' that 'the cripple, and the blind' should be treated as equal citizens—Mansie's words are expressive of an ideology, and it is an ideology which must be read through other ideologies and thus become ironized to some extent. The revolutionary fervour which gripped parts of Scotland following the French

Revolution would have been implacably opposed by, and to, everything *Blackwood's* represented, as will become clear in my reading of J.G. Lockhart later in this chapter. The radicalisation of Scotland was expressed in substance and form, in political content and choice of language :

The 'Declaration of the Rights of Man,' with special application to the political conditions of Scotland, was printed as a broadsheet, and even translated into Gaelic. Riots, heralded by revolutionary handbills, and accompanied in some cases by the erection of Trees of Liberty, broke out in various parts of the country. Further, the common people, thus roused at length to a sense of their political rights, were organised into societies' known as the Friends of the People, which, unlike the parent association in London, were run on democratic lines.²⁰

The puritan mode of reading the world as text, as symbolic representation of God's will, is reproduced in this novel as Mansie's comic misinterpretation or his egotistical over-interpretation. In chapter sixteen he believes a mock duel to be real, and the text seems to be sensitive to, and to exploit, the gap dividing performance from interpretation. The puritan ideology of self-reflection is mediated as both narratively compulsive and materially anomalous. Every personal experience whether trivial or traumatic is given a meaning outwith its direct expression, by Mansie; rendering everything symbolic, Mansie loses all sense of proportion:

First came Mungo Glen's misfortune with regard to the blood-soiling of the new nankeen trowsers, the foremost of his transactions, and a bad omen—next, the fire, and all its wonderfals, the saving the old bedridden woman's precious life, and the destruction of the poor cat—syne the robbery of the hen-house by the Eirish neterdo-weels [*sic*], who paid so sweetly for their pranks—and lastly, the hoax, the thieving of the cheese-toaster without the handle, and the banishment of the spaewife.

These were awful signs of the times, and seemed to say that the world was fast coming to a finis; the ends of the earth appearing to have combined in a great Popish plot of villainy. Every man that had a heart to feel, must have trembled amid these threatening, judgement-like, and calamitous events.

(*MW*, p.149)

Through this ironic presentation of the specifically Puritan mode of perception, Moir suggests the comic nature of the idea of identity itself.

The specific contestation of post-Union Scottish identity is evident in John Gibson Lockhart's *Some Passages in the Life of Mr Adam Blair* (1822), in which we can read a working-out of the interconnectedness between the burgeoning British Empire and the differentiated traditions of a Scottish rural culture.²¹ Lockhart's well-known Toryism is apparent in much of the novel, but far more interesting, at least for this thesis, is the opening up of the question of identity to the forces of economic class and textuality. Much of *Adam Blair* is clumsy, especially in its contrived Ossianic Romanticism, but even in these parts it exhibits a feeling for the anxieties of the early nineteenth-century middle-classes and the possibilities which Romantic subjectivity seemed to offer for human agency. *Adam Blair* is interesting both for its practice of representation and for its symptomatic lacunae.

As a Tory deeply involved in the literary—and thus political—debates of early nineteenth-century Edinburgh, Lockhart's position as a regular contributor on *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* presented him the opportunity to promote a particular ideology of literature and of its socio-economic determinants. The notorious attacks upon Keats and Leigh Hunt as 'Cockney' poets are indicative of the particular prejudices and fears of Lockhart and his friends.²² Although at odds with the Whig establishment of Francis Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*, the Tory group in Edinburgh shared with the Whigs a fear of the after-effects of the French Revolution; effects which were still being felt in the demands of radicals throughout Britain. Jeffrey's reformist ideology no more promoted egalitarian politics than did Lockhart's die-hard Toryism, as 'both reformers and conservatives firmly believed [...] in the natural inequality of man.'²³

Especially on the West coast, Scotland had a nascent movement of popular unrest; inspired by poor working conditions, inflation and food shortages. Michael Lynch writes that in 1816 & 1817 mass political meetings were taking place (one at Thrushgrove outside Glasgow attracting between 30,000 and 40,000 people), strikes were followed by mass arrests and trials for sedition.²⁴ The 'Peterloo massacre' at St Peter's Fields in Manchester—August, 1819—raised the social and political

temperature in England, while in Scotland in April 1820 a band of weavers and others marched from Glasgow to Falkirk to seize an iron works—they were mown down by cavalry. But these events are relevant not merely because they were contemporaneous with Lockhart's early writing career, but because Lockhart was himself a Volunteer cavalryman, taking part in manoeuvres designed to flush out the Radicals during the 1820 rising. Lockhart's involvement in the class politics of his day is reproduced in *Adam Blair* as fictional melodrama; specific social antagonisms are discursively mediated as historical commentary by the narrating voice.

Writing from his cavalry posting in Glasgow to his then-fiancée, Sophia Scott, Lockhart expresses concern over the potential mass popularity of the Radicals'—cause: there is, Lockhart writes, 'fear they could easily muster many many thousands'.²⁵ Lockhart's feeling that an irreconcilable conflict of interests necessitated the violent defeat of the Radicals by the forces of established law and order is spelled out in a further letter to Sophia, dated April, 1820: 'They [the Radicals] will be slaughtered like dogs when they rise & I wish in mercy to themselves & for the peace of all they would rise soon'.²⁶ The words 'mercy to themselves' attempt to conceal the ideological justification of 'slaughter' beneath a rhetoric of Christian charity. In fact, the Radicals did not get the support they had hoped for, and surrendered. The leaders were hanged and beheaded, Lockhart writing to a political ally that 'until they are all hanged there can be no tranquility here'.²⁷

In *Adam Blair*, Lockhart's yearning for 'tranquility' is mediated as a narrative of lost nationhood, a nationhood imagined as peaceful, religious, and strictly hierarchical. The letters cited above show the depth of Lockhart's personal commitment to the political establishment as it then was in the 1820's. Like Scott's *Waverley*, Lockhart's novel looks to the past for signs of a distinctive and proudly assertive Scottish national 'character'. The past is a safe haven for playing out a fantasy of national harmony; extolling the virtues of Scottish nationhood, and decrying the persecutions visited upon those seeking to uphold the nation's religious

independence, *Adam Blair* seems to take the side of the losers in history—to ‘brush history against the grain’, in Walter Benjamin’s useful metaphor.²⁸

By the time of *Adam Blair*’s publication in 1822, the Scottish Covenanters’ struggles to establish a presbyterian ascendancy in Scotland had been the subject of Walter Scott’s *Old Mortality* (1816), and James Hogg’s *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818). In 1823, John Galt’s *Ringan Gilhaize* was published, and it is probably the best of all novels on that subject. It is interesting to note the importance placed upon the events of “the Killing Time”—the 1680’s—by these writers, all of whom were writing at the beginning of the nineteenth-century; the historical struggle of conscience against law seems to me to lie at the heart of their interest.

In *Adam Blair*, direct narratorial comments regarding the suppression of the seventeenth-century Covenanters historicizes the mid-eighteenth century events of the narrative proper. Description of the fictional Cross-Meikle kirkyard, as it stands in the 1750’s, is interwoven with a lament for the defeated Covenanters:

There was a green headstone there, rudely fashioned, and most rudely sculptured, to which their fingers were pointed with feelings of yet loftier veneration. That stone marked the spot where Mr Blair’s grandfather was laid—a simple peasant of the parish—one whose time on earth had been abridged in consequence of what he had done and suffered in days when God’s chosen race, and the true patriots of our country, were hunted up and down like the beasts of the field—when the citizens of a Christian land durst not sing a psalm in the wilderness, without the risk of being hewn into pieces by the sword of some godless slave. They who are acquainted with Scotland—above all, with the west of Scotland—cannot be ignorant of the reverence which is still cherished for the seed of the martyrs. Such feelings were more widely spread, and more intensely felt, in former times than, I am sorry to say, they are now. It was to them, in no small degree, that Adam Blair was indebted for the deep affection with which his person and all his concerns were, and always had been, regarded by the people of his parish. To their love he had ‘titles manifold,’ but not the least was his being the grandson and namesake of old Adam Blair, who had fought against bloody Clavers and the butcher Dalyell, at Bothwell-bridge, and endured torture, without shrinking, in the presence of false Lauderdale.

(*AB*, pp.17-18)

We can locate, between this passage and Lockhart's letter to Sophia, a similarity alongside an important distinction. The phrase 'the true patriots of our country, were hunted up and down like the beasts of the field—when the citizens of a Christian land durst not sing a psalm in the wilderness, without the risk of being hewn down by the sword of some godless slave' seems to echo the letter to Sophia, regarding the Radicals who would be 'slaughtered like dogs when they arise'. Yet the specific sentiments are precisely opposed: past rebels against the law of the land, those who have been defeated, can be safely eulogized as national 'martyrs', whereas those involved in the 1820's uprising are justly to be slaughtered. The place of the Covenanting 'martyrs' in Scottish history is important to the whole narrative impetus of *Adam Blair*, because as the above passage tells us, it is precisely because of his grandfather's part in the Covenanting resistance that Adam Blair is held in esteem by his parishioners. The minister's personal authority in this specific instance comes from a past and familial defiance of state authority.

The narrative voice which opines that 'they who are acquainted with Scotland—above all, with the west of Scotland—cannot be ignorant of the reverence which is still cherished for the seed of the martyrs', claims for itself—and denies to the reader—an innate understanding of the historical resonance of 'the green headstone' in the kirkyard. It is a persistent narrative trope of *Adam Blair* that the reader's ignorance of Scottish signification is produced in dialectical relationship with the Scottish 'identity' of the narrator; and that this identity oscillates between metropolitan irony and 'native' sincerity. Towards the end of the novel, after Adam has confessed his sexual relationship with a married woman to the Assembly at Glasgow, we read that 'those who know what were the habitudes and feelings of the religious and virtuous peasantry of the west of Scotland half a century ago, can need no explanation of the immediate effects of the things which have been narrated in this last chapter, upon the inhabitants at Cross-Meikle' (*AB*, p.224). The message is clear—you, the reader, don't know what 'the habitudes and feelings' were but I, the narrator, do and I will tell you. However, the double bind is that the narrator is also

as literate, educated, ironic and knowing as the metropolitan reader—the narrator stands astride two cultures, two times and two places, mediating from a position of power.

In his overview of Kailyard fiction, Ian Campbell argues that ‘the kailyarders invited pride in a Scottish Church, social fabric, educational system and historical sense’.²⁹ *Adam Blair* seems to ‘invite’ this pride, and we can bring out a further implication of Campbell’s argument if we understand this invitation as an attempt to reproduce a particular construction of Scottishness. Lockhart’s novel, reproducing as text the complexities of authority and resistance, reifies social structures and historical events into a knowable Scottish ‘character’. The reader is invited to observe this character, but to remember they can never fully know him because, unlike the narrator, the reader has no access to the full significance of Scottish history. The particular textual result of this discursive opposition of reader’s ignorance and narrator’s knowledge is glossing. The glossing of Kailyard—which is usually read as an insult to, and denial of, a specifically Scottish subjectivity—gains ironic potential when read in the light of *Adam Blair*, in which glossing denies agency to the implied English reader.

In *Adam Blair*, the reader’s ignorance of ‘Scotland’ is a fundamental trope. We are informed that ‘it is the rule in Scotland, that no male, except it be a husband, father, or a brother, can be permitted to remain in the room while the coffin-lid is screwed down upon a female corpse’ (*AB*, p.14). Clearly, we can read this as either an author *writing for* an English readership, privileging their world-view in order to sell more books; or, we can read it as writing against the grain of English linguistic and cultural hegemony, forcing the English reader to recognize the existence of cultural difference and to accept that, perhaps, ‘Scottish’ ways might be better than ‘English’ ways.

In one of the many narratorial asides, the style of the tourist-pamphlet combines with moral reflection concerning the chastity and sobriety of the Scots:

The church itself, which stands near the western limit of the burial-ground, is one of the few fine old ecclesiastical edifices that are still to be found in the country districts of Scotland. It is a small, but an exquisitely beautiful specimen of the earliest and simplest of Gothic architecture, having no richness of minute decoration, but perfectly graceful in its outlines, and chaste in its whole effect. Altogether in a country where few of those buildings remain otherwise than in a state of ruin, Cross-Meikle Kirk is well entitled to be visited with considerable attention. And although, to be sure, such matters were little thought of by people of taste and cultivation (for that is the fashionable phrase,) in the days of Adam Blair, the natural good feelings of the peasantry of that parish had always led them to be not a little proud of their fine 'grand auld Kirk'.

(AB, p.67)

'The natural good feelings of the peasantry of the parish' objectifies and depoliticizes them; however, seen as the discursive construction of an ideology of 'Scottishness', the passage articulates an image of cultural strength and resilience. The community which has the minister at its head, isolated and English-speaking, is a lowland community, and as such is demonstrably less strange to Lockhart's readership than are the Highlanders elsewhere in the novel. Linguistically, the proximity of the Lowlanders with the English is signified in the phrase 'grand auld Kirk' which appears to point to the difference of the peasants, while actually reflecting their similarity to the English, the words requiring no gloss. The Highlands, though, are represented as a wholly different world.

Importantly, when the Highlands are evoked in the novel, they are variously represented through the language of Romantic sublimity, alienating otherness and proprietorial commodification. If Scotland, in general, is figured as only marginally 'other' to the English reader—and vice versa —then the Highlands are figured as completely 'other' to Adam Blair, himself, and to his narrative. In his most famous book, the *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, Lockhart describes the tartan pageantry of George IV's visit to Edinburgh of 1822:

With all respect for the generous qualities which the Highland clans have often exhibited, it was difficult to forget that they had always constituted a small, and almost always an unimportant part of the Scottish population; and when one reflected how miserably their numbers had of

late years been reduced in consequence of the selfish and hard-hearted policy of their landlords, it almost seemed as if there was a cruel mockery in giving so much prominence to their pretensions.³⁰

The Highlanders are here posited as ineffective and the ‘mockery’ of Hanoverian tartanry adds to that ineffectiveness. The passage is sympathetic, but only in a pitying way. The internal colonialism practised upon the Highlands, through which the land of the region became improvable—profitable—for capitalist land-owning interests insisted upon the irrelevance of the Highlanders other than as a safe, mythic, primitive race; and it is in this ahistorical role that Lockhart mainly casts them. The Highlanders lack of praxis is what counts here, and Lockhart’s praise of their ‘generous qualities’ manifests the hegemonic ideology of metropolitan Britain in which ‘Celtic natural spontaneity could easily become animality and incompetence.’³¹

As both picturesque landscape and economic capital, the Highland lands and people are commodified in *Adam Blair*. Captain Campbell, in particular, buys into the Scotland of this novel. Lockhart is quite explicit about this, and in fact the ironic note struck in the account of Campbell’s purchase of a Highland castle is a high point of the narrative. Revealing contradictions inherent in the aristocracy’s exploitation of the Highlands as a playground, this text also reveals some of the ways in which literary and artistic representations both produce and reproduce prevailing social forces:

A picturesque, rather than profitable domain, on the shores of his own dear Lochfine, received the weary conqueror, ‘curru descendentem Teutonico,’ and he took very solemn possession of a grand castle, containing a parlour, a bedroom, a garret, a closet, and a barn. To this imagined Otranto Mrs Campbell approached with glistening eyes, and a beating heart; while the captain leaned back in the herring-boat, and snuffed pinch on pinch, as who should say, ‘What think ye of that?’

In three years or less, neither the Captain nor the lady thought any thing about it, except that it was a raw, cold, shell of a house, with not one rational neighbour within thirty miles.

(*AB*, p.53)

Embedded in these lines are some crucial vectors of the Scottish political and literary landscape of the early nineteenth century, together with what Henry James approvingly referred to as Lockhart's 'taste for the concrete'.³² The opposition of 'profitable' and 'picturesque' in the description of the castle is more problematic than it seems. Peter Womack's thesis that the depiction of the Highlands as mythological, romantic and exotic—or, picturesque—was an intrinsic part of the project of making it cultivable and therefore profitable through improving clearances can be convincingly applied to Lockhart's novel.³³ The castle is ironically referred to as an 'imagined Otranto', and Charlotte is given the stock attributes of the romantic heroine—references to a specifically literary, rather than objective, world. The Highlands are imagined throughout the novel as alien; somewhere to visit but not live, as there is 'not one rational neighbour within thirty miles'. On his way to Uigness, aboard a small boat carrying fish, Blair's fellow boatmen 'spoke Gaelic, and Blair of course understood nothing of what they said' (*AB*, p.154); and, we are told that Adam's 'eyes had been feasting on the new loveliness of the landscape' (*AB*, p.155)—the Highlands are a site of otherness and of conspicuous consumption.

Whilst the narrative is ironic in places, it nevertheless exploits and reproduces the paradigm of the Scottish Highlands as propagated by Macpherson's 'Ossian' poetry and Walter Scott's poems and novels. But in *Adam Blair* the romance is exposed as fallacy, and the incomers feel lost. The very fact that Campbell feels like an outsider in his own part of the country suggests a breaking up of the previous social bond of clanship, a bond replaced by capitalist proprietorship and 'improvement'. Indeed, Campbell's particular brand of tartanry is a recognizable example of the ways in which the past is made safe, comfortable, and purchasable, for the present—it represents the commodification of history. Campbell's alienation seems to be the price he pays for his active role in the British colonialist project both abroad and at home.

This interconnectedness between British colonialist practice abroad and domestic manifestations of imperialist practice needs to be understood as a dialectic. This is

not to equate too directly the widely different experiences of those colonized overseas with those exploited at home in Britain—such reductionism would illuminate neither reality—but I believe that a common thread of capitalist expansion, supported by overwhelming military superiority and systematic dehumanization of the indigenous population, is a thread which runs through British history of the period and is perhaps its defining feature.

Structural and ideological parallels between British armed exploits overseas and in Britain itself are exposed in Alexander Somerville's *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (1848). In one of the early chapters, Somerville recounts his childhood memories of the same Radical uprising of the early 1820s as mentioned with reference to Lockhart. Somerville tells how schoolchildren would frighten each other with rumours of the impending uprising, then boast of how their brothers, cousins and uncles would kill the Radicals. But, writes Somerville, 'for aught [they] knew their military relations might be in the East or the West Indies, while those people called radicals were, so far as Scotland was concerned, located about Glasgow, seventy miles from us.'³⁴

Somerville impresses upon the reader that the community in which he grew up consisted mainly of small farmers, and that fear of a proletarian and craftsmen's revolt haunted these small landowners. What the above passage clearly indicates is the connection between the oppression of recalcitrant natives of the East and West Indies and of the British mainland. The soldier killing in the West Indies could as well be killing outside Glasgow—and as Lockhart himself points out, they were. Crucially, it also points to Scotland's role in the constructing of the British Empire itself; recalling us to Tom Nairn's forceful attack on Scotland's part in what Nairn calls 'the general business enterprise of Anglo-Scots imperialism':

When the going was good for imperialism, the world heard very little of the Scots' longing for independence.

[...]. After its own grab at colonial empire had failed with the disastrous Darian Expedition of 1698, the Scottish bourgeoisie joined forces with the English in 1707 [...]. For two centuries they have belonged to the

conquerors. Their industries were, as E.J. Hobsbawm puts it, 'the cutting edge of a world industrial economy'. Their armies were the cutting edge of British imperialism.³⁵

An analogy between British colonialist practice abroad and the construction of a unified bourgeois capitalist state at home is also made in Robert Mudie's satirical critique of Edinburgh and Scottish society, *The Modern Athens* (1825). Regarding Scottish representation at Westminster, Mudie wrote that 'the members that are sent to the House of Commons as representatives of Scotland, may just as properly be considered the representatives of Bengal or Barbados, with which they have often fully as much connexion, and in the welfare of which they are fully as much interested'.³⁶ The likening of Scotland to overseas colonies is both alienating and apt—Mudie's analogy reveals both the imperialist cast of British society in the 1820s and the peripheralisation of Scotland within Britain itself.

Writing in 1839 to Lord Brougham, the evangelist Hugh Miller, although primarily concerned with religious rather than economic matters, nevertheless constructs his argument around definitions of rights and power. Comparing the denial of presbyteries' right to select their minister to serfdom and slavery, Miller argues it is all a question of authority:

You tell us of 'existing institutions, vested rights, positive interests.' Do we not know that the slaveholders, who have so long and so stubbornly withstood your Lordship's truly noble appeals in behalf of the African bondsmen, have been employing an exactly similar language for the last fifty years; and that the onward progress of man to the high place which God has willed him to occupy has been impeded at every step by 'existing institutions, vested rights, positive interests?'

[...]. My grandfather was a grown man at a period when the neighbouring proprietor could have dragged him from his cottage, and hung him up on the gallows-hill of the barony. It is not yet a century since the colliers of our southern districts were serfs bound to the soil. The mischievous and intolerant law of patronage [1712] still presses its dead weight on our consciences.³⁷

Language is 'employed' by the powerful as a bulwark against the claims of the serf, the bondsman and, by analogy, the Scottish presbyterians. While it would be

ridiculous to equate the imposition of a minister upon an unwilling congregation with the physical brutality of slavery and serfdom, Miller conceives their analogous relationship with the rhetoric of authority. In both cases, established practices are self-ordained by the 'language' of the hegemonic interests; because already 'existing', laws have the aura of being right, of being somehow natural. To oppose this normalization of ideology, Miller 'employs' his own discursive tools.

Empire, slavery, and the established religious order are all inter-connected under Miller's fierce defence of the rights of presbyteries to choose their own ministers. Like Tom Paine, Miller challenges established authority by rhetorical deconstruction of its ideology. Interestingly, Miller's complaint echoes that of the American colonies in the lead up to the American Revolution—focussing upon a specific colonialist practice, they question the right of Parliament in England to dictate taxation policy to American traders, or religious policy to Scottish presbyterians.

Four years after Miller's letter was written, the Church of Scotland was riven by the Disruption; so we can read the letter as a symptomatic inscription of social conflict, rather than as a discrete, merely private complaint. The connection between the challenge made by letters such as Miller's to established authority in the specifically religious sphere, and the possibility of praxis at the socio-economic level, has been made by James Young, who argues that the lower-classes used the Disruption as a means of 'getting at their enemies'.³⁸ To support the thesis that religious freedom was used as a proxy for the struggle for economic and political rights, Young cites a book published in 1840 which records a worker saying to the landed appointer, "your appointing him was the very reason we wad na' tak' him".³⁹ This has import for my thesis that by discursive means, identities can be proposed which operate as dialectical alternatives to the uniform, monologic idea of Scottish or American 'character'. In focussing upon this dialogic form of Scottish nineteenth century narrative, I hope to problematize the generic boundaries which have dogged discussion of the Kailyard in particular. Every text discussed in this chapter impacts

on the Kailyard, either at the level of subject-matter (religious disputes, rural traditions, bourgeois romanticism), or in its linguistic differentiations.

In William Alexander's *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* (1871), the connection between the religious disputations and broader class politics of mid-nineteenth century Scotland is clearly drawn; Gibb, Alexander's Aberdeenshire tenant-farmer, is the point of connection between the isolated world of the rural north-east of Scotland and the developing anger at the arbitrary power wielded by the landed classes.⁴⁰ The parochialism of *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* is not a sentimental parochialism, but one convincing in its detailed contingencies. It specifically articulates a power-relationship at the level of language, in a dialogue between Doric dialect and standard English; and the social consequences of homelessness, industrialization and itinerant labouring, are rendered immediate in this dialogic form.

Early in the novel, in the chapter 'Johnny Gibb's Political Education', the direct confrontation between Johnny and the 'rather pompous laird' establishes the tone of the novel; Johnny 'resented the hint given' by the laird that he should vote against the Liberal candidate, and 'at the polling-place reminded Sir Simon, in very plain terms, that they two stood now, politically, on an equality' (*JG*, p.26). The trope of linguistic hierarchy which Susan Manning's identifies as subordinating the vernacular 'dialect' to the dominant English language in Scottish and American literature can not, I feel, be validly applied to *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*. Alexander's 'Preface to the Second Edition' crucially establishes a reciprocity between English and the Doric. In the following passage absolutely nothing is surrendered to the supposed domination of the English tongue; Alexander evokes difference, not deference:

By several of the reviewers the preparation of a Glossary was suggested; and it has been urged since by various private correspondents. But in the case of one who has no pretensions to skill as a lexicographer, it was felt that a task of the kind was not to be hastily undertaken. The writer had endeavoured to make his *dramatis personae* speak in their native tongue with idiomatic accuracy; to render their speech in exact or satisfactory

English equivalents was a very different thing. And it was just in those particular parts of it which it would have been most desirable to have so rendered, that existing Dictionaries gave least help. On the whole, then, as the time for issuing the present edition had been fixed earlier than would admit of the requisite care being taken, it was thought better that the question of a Glossary should be postponed *sine die*.

(*JG*, p.v-vi)

William Donaldson has argued the case for Alexander's place as a leading figure in the radical popular press of Scotland in the Victorian years,⁴¹ and this Preface, beneath its polite refusal to anglicize the speech due to lack of time, cogently argues the case for a local dialect, not least because certain phrases cannot be easily rendered into 'exact or satisfactory English equivalents', because there are none.

The politics of *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* are contested at the level of language; it is through the various dialects that the social and economic alliances are signified. In the chapter 'The Public Meeting', the account of a disturbance over the appointment of minister is given and it is redolent with the politics of language; the word of the law is pitted against the word of the folk. In addressing the public meeting, Johnny Gibb, we are told:

Recounted how the Justices called a great meeting at Pitmachie, at which Sir Robert presided, and how the Captain reported, *ad longam*, all the horrors of the day at Culsalmond; and that not only windows were broken and seats torn up, but that the 'rioters' had made considerable progress towards toppling down the gallery, body bulk!—'Jist like 'im to tell that,' exclaimed Johnny with vehemence. And how the Justices gravely agreed that 'a riot' *did* take place, that 'a spirit of resistance to the law' had been gaining ground in that unhappy region; and that the Justices considered it their duty to intimate all this to "Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department," and a host of other high dignitaries, including the Lord Advocate [...] 'An' that's the bonny upshot o' a meetin' o' a score o' Sirs, an' Generals, an' Captains, an' common lairds, heeld in Maister Copper's in the thirtieth day o' November last past,' said Johnny, throwing down a sadly chafed newspaper, from which he had been endeavouring to read.

(*JG*, p.112)

We notice that it is the language of the Establishment which is ironized here, which is placed in quotations as though it were an oddity, a 'dialect'. The emphasis upon 'riot' reveals the agenda behind legal language; before any action can be prosecuted it has to be named, and once named it enters the ambit of 'the law'. Those who 'riot' become subject to the punishment against 'rioters'; authority is here seen to articulate itself by tautology.

The emphasis upon language, in particular the directness of Johnny's personal speech idiom, locates discourse at the ideological fulcrum of the novel, constructing a narrative which goes beyond portrayals of discrete character. Establishing immediate and dramatic class and regional identifications, *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* explodes any idealizing myth of a united Scotland, let alone a united Britain. The grounding of property laws in exploitation, masked by the cloak of custom, is pointedly referred to by Johnny; and like Hugh Miller, Johnny argues against the presumption that because a certain social practice is carried on, it is unchangeable.

Talking with his wife about their own eviction from their farm, Johnny argues that:

'It's nae oorsel's nor Sir Seemon 't aw'm, compleenin' aboot in particular. It's the general run o' the thing. Fat for sudna lawbourin' the rigs in an honest wye for beheef o' the countra at lairge gite a man a richt to sit still an' keep the grip, raither nor lat the haill pooter o' traffikein' wi' the grun', for gweed or ill, be leeft wi' a set o' men that nae only never laid a han' till't, but maybe never hardly leet their een seett.'

'Is that the lairds?'

'Ay, ay.'

'Eh, but ye ken they gat it fae their forbears.'

'An' fat aboot it! Fa gyau 't to their forbears, aw wud like to ken? A set o' reivin soonrels that tyeuk it wi' the strong han', an' syne preten't to han' 't doon fae ane till anither, an' buy 't an' sell 't wi' lawvyers' vreetin' on a bit sheep's skin. Na, na, there's something clean vrang at the boddom o' 't.'

(JG, p.247)

The force of Johnny's rhetoric challenges the social, linguistic, and also therefore the literary hierarchy. Establishing the discursive determinations of authority and resistance, in discarding the 'sentimental' tag attached to rural provincial subject-matter, Alexander here 'elevates the commonplace to the level of art.'⁴² If, as Susan Manning and Robert Crawford have separately but connectedly argued, there is an ideological and aesthetic commonality between the position of the 'provincial' and the modernist (or even postmodernist) artist, then *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, with its open antipathy to established linguistic norms in literature, and to authoritarian social forms must feature in that equation.⁴³ This novel understands and demonstrates the constructedness of identity; placing emphasis on the social, and hence contested, nature of identity, it would seem to warn that 'we cannot afford to assume that "traditions" are in fact traditional'.⁴⁴

The particular ways in which agrarian capitalism moulded both landscape and people is delineated clearly in *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*. The squaring-off of borders to increase profitability, the expulsion from the land of those too ill to work—thus avoiding the need to house them—the miserable life of young, single mothers; Alexander presents these not, as in so much Victorian fiction from Dickens onward, as moral problems but as political and ideological ones. They are matters not of individual, and therefore somehow 'natural' or pre-social character, but of systemic contradictions and tensions. The narrative engages with the problems of social change and the inadequacies of the burgeoning capitalist system.

Raymond Williams's theoretical account of the capacity of 'dominant interests' to adapt to rural change seems to me analogous to Alexander's fictional narrative. In his great *The Country and the City*, Williams notes:

Following the fortunes, through these centuries, of the dominant interests, it is a story of growth and achievement, but for the majority of men it was the substitute of one form of domination for another: the mystified feudal order replaced by a mystified agrarian capitalist order, with just enough continuity, in titles and in symbols of authority, in successive compositions of a 'natural order', to confuse and control.⁴⁵

It is against these very 'symbols of authority' that *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* stands, demystifying the agrarian capitalist order and historicizing it in the context of the previously hegemonic feudal order. But it is also important to recognize that a number of the defining characteristics of *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, particularly its rural setting, its setting in Scotland's past and its interest in the labouring middle and lower classes, are precisely features which have led most critics to decry the Kailyard as sentimental and unliterary. William Donaldson protests that Alexander's work should not be considered alongside that of Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett, 'from which it differs radically in outlook and technique'.⁴⁶ However, it seems to me to be imperative for any account of the representation of Scottish 'identity' in nineteenth-century narrative fiction, that these 'peripheral' writers of the Kailyard are reassessed through their interconnections with other parochial writing. Only by acknowledging the common structural framework which exiles Barrie, along with Moir and Alexander, to the literary periphery can we understand the core-periphery paradigm as, ultimately, a discursive production of authority. The terminology of 'core', 'periphery', and 'parochial' does not reflect an already-existing binary world of outside and inside the magic circle of culture; it actually produces, and reproduces, this world.

Central to the core-periphery paradigm, at least as it was formulated by critics of the Kailyard until the 1980's, is the idea that a text can only belong *either* to the core *or* to the periphery, not to both. The rationale being that in order to have an inclusive English Tradition then other things have to be excluded. And, obviously, in order to have a Scottish Tradition then any text not deemed sufficiently Scottish has to be excluded—or, to recall William Donaldson's exact words, placed 'where it belongs'.⁴⁷

In considering the Kailyard, and what we might term the 'post-Kailyard' writing of Lewis Grassie Gibbon and George Douglas Brown,⁴⁸ the contemporary reader needs to avoid engaging in such implicit negativism as J.B. Pick's assertion that 'reaction

to their [Maclaren and Crockett's] work produced a rage of darkness from which Scottish literature has never fully recovered'.⁴⁹ It is a questionable thesis that Scottish literature somehow needs to, or can, 'recover' from itself. Pick seems to imagine that Kailyard, and subsequent critical and fictional responses to it, have somehow caused a deviation from an ideal, but never of course fully describable, great plan of Scottish literature. This sort of criticism has plagued Scottish writing for a long time and is peculiarly representative of Macherey's 'normative fallacy'.⁵⁰ George Blake, in predictable anti-Kailyard mode, claims that *Mansie Wauch* 'started a fashion that was to hinder Scottish literary development over a long period'.⁵¹ Blake's perspective here is of a kind which, according to Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, 'clearly argues the inferiority of Scottish culture'.⁵²

J.M. Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls* (1889) seems to me to offer a forceful argument against reading the rural Scottish fiction of the late nineteenth-century as either mere parochialism, or, alternatively, un-Scottish.⁵³ This book constructs, as both concrete and ideological forms, the material forces of an earlier historical age. To argue that the fiction is less valid because Barrie 'really wrote in the first place of Kirriemuir as it was in 1840 or thereabouts',⁵⁴ suggests the invalidity of the whole concept of historical fiction. Indeed, a truly historicized literary practice has to contain the past in order to understand the present. And to argue that 'the industrial fret was completely ignored. The Scots storyteller either followed Scott and Stevenson through the heather with a claymore at his belt, or he lingered round the bonnie brier bush, telling sweet, amusing little stories of bucolic intrigue as seen through the windows of the Presbyterian manse', seems to me a crucial misreading, certainly of *Auld Licht Idylls*.⁵⁵

Barrie's novel is aware of the separation, and differentiation, of the provincial from the municipal, and it brings into focus, for the municipal reader, the material world of the provincial. The 'fret' with which it deals is different from, but interconnected with, the urban social experience with which George Blake would have it wrestle. Refusing either to idealize the past or blindly praise industrial progress, *Auld Licht*

Idylls insists upon the ideological contestation of the rural world. By emphasizing the isolation of Thrums, and the even greater isolation of its hinterland, the narrator gives a specificity to the placing of the narrative, and a distance between reader and text which aestheticizes the ideology of the colonial—simultaneously interesting the reader, and protecting them from the consequences:

Snow during the night and several degrees of frost by day were what Thrums began to accept as a revised order of nature. Vainly the Thrums doctor, whose practice extends into the glens, made repeated attempts to reach his distant patients, twice driving so far into the dreary waste that he could neither go on nor turn back. A ploughman who contrived to gallop ten miles for him did not get home for a week. Between the town, which is nowadays an agricultural centre of some importance, and the outlying farms communication was cut off for a month; and I heard subsequently of one farmer who did not see a human being, unconnected with his own farm, for several weeks.

(*ALI*, p.37)

Later, in *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan* (1932), Barrie was to use this device of the isolated, and consequently introspective, narrator to quite brilliant effect. Socialization is at the heart of Barrie's writing in *Auld Licht Idylls*. Far from sentimentalizing the lives of the weavers and farm-labourers, the narrative wrestles with conflicts of class and familial roles, and it uses its own textuality to problematize the function of communication and of story-telling in particular. To open to examination some of the critical presuppositions made about, and attacks made upon, the Kailyard, I want to look at a number of passages from *Auld Licht Idylls* to suggest, in the light of its various critics, what a reading sensitive to the discursive operations of the text might produce.

The living conditions of the farm labourers, commodified by agrarian capitalism into 'Hands', is graphically presented early in the book:

'Hands' are not huddled together nowadays in squalid barns more like cattle than men and women, but bothies in the neighbourhood of Thrums are not yet things of the past [...]. Here is a picture of a bothy of to-day that I visited recently. Over the door there is a water-spout that has given way, and as I entered I got a rush of rain down my neck. The passage was

so small that one could easily have stepped from the doorway on to the ladder standing against the wall which was there in lieu of a staircase. 'Upstairs' was a mere garret, where a man could not stand erect even in the centre [...] I climbed into this garret, which is at present used as a store-room for agricultural odds and ends. At harvest-time, however, it is inhabited—full to overflowing. A few decades ago as many as fifty labourers engaged for the harvest had to be housed in the farm out-houses on beds of straw. There was no help for it, and men and women had to congregate in these barns together [...] Nowadays the harvest is gathered in so quickly, and machinery does so much that used to be done by hand, that this crowding of labourers together, which was the bothy system at its worst, is nothing like what it was.

(*ALI*, pp.48-9)

The writing seems, at first reading, quite straightforward and objective—detailed description and simple commentary: 'there was no help for it'. However, Barrie's writing is charged with a social concern which cannot be ignored; the information that the herding of the "Hands" into 'squalid barns', 'more like cattle than men', had finished by the late nineteenth century is countered by the fact that the 'mere garret, where a man could not stand erect even in the centre' fills 'to overflowing' during harvest-time. The implicit equating of the workers with 'agricultural odds and ends'—the room houses each at different times of the year—is almost metaphorical; the discursive and the objective begin to merge here.

One exploitative working practice has given away to another, which seems only a slight improvement; and the improvement is due not to any sense of obligation on the part of the farm-owner but because 'nowadays the harvest is gathered in so quickly, and machinery does so much that used to be done by hand' that fewer labourers are employed. The employment of the earlier 'hands' recalls—but actually precedes in terms of publication date, if not canonical status—the scene in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* where the farm-labourers struggle to keep pace with 'the red tyrant that the women had come to serve—a timber-framed construction with straps and wheels appertaining—the despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves'.⁵⁶ In the passage from *Auld Licht Idylls*, the reduction of the agricultural labourer to machine-part, having to obey the pace of a mechanical engine, confirms

capitalism's burgeoning industrialization of Scotland.⁵⁷ Like the crew aboard Ahab's ship, the farmer-labourers are denied their individuality by the capitalist production process, they are mere limbs; mere 'hands'.

In 1889, the year of publication of *Auld Licht Idylls*, Barrie commented upon the increasing pace of social change, particularly as it affected rural communities, in a periodical article on Hardy:

The closing years of the nineteenth century see the end of many things in country parts, of the peasantry who never go beyond their own parish, of quaint manners and customs, of local modes of speech and ways of looking at existence. Railways and machinery of various sorts create new trades and professions and kill old ones.⁵⁸

That passage could almost be a précis for *Auld Licht Idylls*, not least in its understanding of the variable relationship between the residual practices and values of a disappearing social order and those of an emergent one. Comparing Barrie's account of the bothy-system of the 1840s in this work of fiction with Hugh Miller's contemporary factual account of 1841, we can begin to recognize what a misnomer, certainly in the case of Barrie, was Lewis Grassie Gibbon's 'the scum of Kailyard romance'.⁵⁹

Hugh Miller writes, in 'The Bothy System':

The staple food of the labourer is generally oatmeal cooked in careless haste,—as might be anticipated in the circumstances,—by mixing a portion in a bowl with hot water and a little salt; and often for weeks and months together there is no change in either the materials of this his necessarily heating and unwholesome meal, or in the mode of preparing it. The farmer, his master, in too many instances takes no further care of him after his labours for the day are over. He represents merely a certain quantum of power purchased at a certain price, and applied to a certain purpose; and as it is, unluckily, power purchased by the half-year, and abundant in the market, there is no necessity that it should be husbanded from motives of economy, like that of the farmer's horses or his steam engine; and therefore little heed is taken though it should thus run to waste. The consequences are in most cases deplorable.⁶⁰

The crucial point in Miller's piece is the change in description of the labourer from 'he' to 'it', representing the labourer's metamorphosis from human being to 'a certain quantum of power purchased at a certain price, and applied to a certain purpose'. Miller's anger fires his prose in a way which Barrie's lighter, because further removed, touch does not. However, Miller's piece certainly verifies Barrie's assertions, even though their practice of representation is different.

In *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, religious schisms feed into the class conflict and become a weapon of that conflict; in *Auld Licht Idylls*, religious disputations divide not so much along class lines as regional ones; yet the effect is just as telling to the force of the narrative. In one passage, describing the disposal of a suicide's body, the ironic voice of the narrator gives way to the inhumanity of the situation. Beginning with a jokey reference to the corpse as a piece of meat, it is the vacuity of regional disputation which is ultimately emphasized by this harrowing paragraph:

Pitlums was a farmer in the parish of Thrums, but he had been born at Tilliedrum; and Thrums thanked Providence for that, when it saw him suspended between two hams from his kitchen rafters. The custom was to cart suicides to the quarry at the Galla pond and bury them near the cairn that had supported the gallows; but on this occasion not a farmer in the parish would lend a cart, and for a week the corpse lay on the sanded floor as it had been cut down—an object of awe-struck interest to boys who knew no better than to peep through the darkened window [...]. Finally old Hobart and two others tied a rope round the body, and dragged it from the farm to the cairn, a distance of four miles.

(*ALI*, pp.118-119)

The criminalization of suicides—buried near 'the gallows'—results in the body being deserted for a week, lying 'as it had been cut down'; as in the description of the bothy-system, the detached tone of the narrative adds to, rather than detracts from, the efficacy of the piece. The 'distance of four miles' over which the human corpse was dragged seems, oddly enough, further for the reader in the metropolis of the 1890s—becoming used to modern transport—than it would to 'old Hobart and two others'. This subtle evocation of the gap in years recurs throughout *Auld Licht*

Idylls, and the need to remember, and recount, events from the past—events which might be otherwise forgotten or differently interpreted—forms much of the stylistic and narrative impetus for the book.

The fundamentally anecdotal form of much Kailyard fiction is one of its main weaknesses, according to its critics. Even sympathetic historicizing critiques, such as Cairns Craig's essay 'The Body in the Kit Bag', or Ian Campbell's *Kailyard*, point to a lack both of history and of the dialectic of environment. Craig writes: 'By-passed by history, the weavers of Thrums gain their significance not from their centrality to the social processes of Scotland in the nineteenth century but as an image of a Scottish society in which felt history, real connection with a Scottish past, has disappeared.'⁶¹ And Campbell talks of Kailyard's 'packaged environment [...] which offered few challenges' to the reader.'⁶² It is interesting, ironic even, that the apparently ahistorical trope of the anecdote underlying the 'packaged' structure of Kailyard, is precisely the narrative form which much new historicist and post-colonial criticism find interesting: 'anecdotes [...] are seized in passing from the swirl of experiences and given some shape, a shape whose provisionality still marks them as contingent—otherwise, we would give them the larger, grander name of history—but also makes them available for telling and retelling.'⁶³ It is on this small-scale map of 'local' narrative that Kailyard operates, reproducing history almost as gossip.

In *Auld Licht Idylls*, there is an account of food riots, which is an open, but still fairly laconic, attack upon the interests of the landowners and food producers of the time. The episode of 'the Battle of Cabbylatch' stands witness against revisionist accounts of what 'are now but dimly remembered as the Meal Mobs' (*ALI*, p.123), and it is noted that those who rose against the food barons were of 'various denominations'. Barrie reasons with the reader as to the cause of the riots, and as in *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* the contest is between justice and the law:

At that time the farmers, having control of the meal, had the small towns at their mercy, and they increased its cost. The price of the meal went up

and up, until the famishing people swarmed up the sides of the carts in which it was conveyed to the towns, and, tearing open the sacks, devoured it in handfuls. In Thrums they had a stern sense of justice, and for a time, after taking possession of the meal, they carried it to the square and sold it at what they considered a reasonable price [...]. The raging farmers at last met in council and, noting that they were lusty men and brave, resolved to march in armed force upon the erring people and burn their town.

(*ALI*, pp.124-5)

The common people are 'reasonable' and have 'a stern sense of justice', whereas the farmers' supposed bravery is explained by their armed superiority. The causal language—'having control [...] and they increased', 'they had a stern sense of justice [...] and sold it at what they considered a reasonable price', 'noting that [...] resolved to march'—underscores the historical imperative of the narrative, and emphasizes social action over the 'character' or psychology of individuals. Barrie is here describing, and evaluating, a form of direct class conflict. Edwin Morgan's call for a 'reevaluation of Kailyard'—as has been happening—did not prevent even such a prescient poet and critic as Morgan from generalizing that 'the Kailyard writer was not concerned with tracing the social conditions that led to [slum conditions] or with the altering or removal of these conditions'.⁶⁴

The directness, and determinacy of the above passage is followed by an account of one of the 'individual deeds of prowess', whereby a material object is seen to gain ideological signification, to enter into the realm of the sign:

Individual deeds of prowess were done that day. Of these not the least fondly remembered by her descendants were those of the gallant matron who pursued the most obnoxious farmer in the district even to his very porch with heavy stones and opprobrious epithets. Once when he thought he had left her far behind did he alight to draw breath and take a pinch of snuff, and she was upon him like a flail. With a terror-stricken cry he leapt once more upon his horse and fled, but not without leaving his snuff-box in the hands of the derisive enemy. Meggy has long gone to the kirkyard, but the snuff-mull is still preserved.

(*ALI*, p.128)

The community preserves the snuff-box as a memento, transformed as it is from a utilitarian object of wealth into a symbol of defiance. And the farmer is only remembered as ‘the most obnoxious’, whereas his enemy is honoured with her real name. The writing connects the discursive trope of the symbol with the social world of conflict, and finds an appropriate metaphor. Concerning this small snuff-box, we can say, following Bakhtin ‘the physical object is converted into a sign. Without ceasing to be a part of the material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality.’⁶⁵

It would be difficult to justify an application of George Douglas Brown’s celebrated attack on ‘the sentimental slop of Barrie, and Crockett, and Maclaren’ to *Auld Licht Idylls*.⁶⁶ And the victory over the farmers in the Battle of Cabbylatch, which is recounted without sentiment, is itself only temporary—and the dominant interests of the landowners prevails and violent punishment follows. ‘The law’ wins out over ‘justice’:

The townsmen’s triumph was short-lived. The ringleaders were whipped through the streets of Perth, as a warning to persons thinking of taking the law into their own hands; and all the lasting consolation they got was that, some time afterwards, the chief witness against them, the parish minister, met with a mysterious death. They said it was evidently the hand of God; but some people looked suspiciously at them when they said it.

(ALI, p.129)

The interconnectedness between language and material social realities is strongly made in *Auld Licht Idylls*, and Ian Carter makes the point regarding the name of Barrie’s fictional town that ‘for Barrie, in whom the interest [in decline] is clear, it is the decline of hand-loom weaving that is of interest. His literary disguise for Kirriemuir—Thrums—is significant. Thrums are the ends of warp thread left on a loom after the woven cloth has been removed’.⁶⁷ Language connects the material realities of the weavers’ declining social status and the waste thread; as with the snuff-box, a material product is given ideological significance.

However, also apparent is an awareness of the ability of language consistently to evade fixity and objectification through its differentiation from objective reality. The ability of language to express and suppress contradiction are present in the anecdote of the street preacher named 'The Coat of Many Colours' who, 'told of the liar who exclaimed, "If this is not gospel true may I stand here for ever," and who is standing on that spot still, only nobody knows where it is' (*ALI*, p.240). This is expressive of the contested nature of language and of materiality; in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, Barrie was to make this a central concern of his writing.

I have been trying to identify the ways in which Barrie's Kailyard writing in *Auld Licht Idylls* constructs a socially specific and historically relevant situation. For my thesis, Kailyard fiction, and its generally negative critical reception, highlight a problem in the discursive construction of identity. While concentrating its narrative gaze on a rural past, the Kailyard was indelibly linked with its own present. I would suggest that the distaste in which Kailyard is held by many critics reflects the peculiar hybrid ideology of Scottishness and Britishness which the genre undeniably promotes. If we look briefly at this ideological matrix, before considering Barrie's deconstruction of Kailyard in *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan*, it should be possible to clarify why the discursive trope of sentiment might have appealed.

The connections—ideological and material—which Kailyard and its proponents had with a specific nonconformist, liberal agenda are undeniable. The publishing house of Hodder and Stoughton and the periodical the *British Weekly*, under the tutelage of W.R. Nicoll are well documented, particularly in Thomas Knowles's *Ideology, Art and Commerce*. Based in the London metropolis but seeking to engage with the provinces, this political and theological movement encapsulates some of the more interesting, perhaps because contradictory, aspects of late Victorian culture. The fact that 'the late Victorian literary institution in which the work of Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett was produced, read and criticized was essentially a British, rather than a Scottish phenomenon',⁶⁸ does not obviate the equally clear fact that the Kailyarders constructed a specific 'Scottish' identity for the late nineteenth-century metropolitan

readership—an identity which, the popularity of the genre would suggest, was readily absorbed into the British imperialist world-view. The dialectic within Kailyard between sentiment and protest, between idealism and realism, and, ultimately, between Scottishness and Britishness is expressive of the basically liberal-bourgeois standpoint of the *British Weekly*.

The African travel sketches of the naturalist and evangelical Christian, Henry Drummond, perfectly encapsulate the contradiction at the heart of liberal imperialism—the fact that to ‘help’ the colonized people, it was psychologically and politically necessary to objectify them. In a preface to one of his travel sketches, Drummond imagines one part of Africa as ‘the dusky orphan round whom England has just thrown her kindly arm’.⁶⁹ The import of this patronizing, though doubtless well-intended, nominer is subsequently clarified. Africa is represented as source of European wealth, a commodity for European consumption: ‘on the lower Zambesi, indigo, the orchilla weed, and calumba-root abound, and oil-seeds and sugar-cane could be produced in quantity to supply the whole of Europe’.⁷⁰

Later, in a startlingly explicit example of white European objectification of the black Africans, Drummond ponders on possible uses for the ‘highland African’ in that repository of European civilization—the library. Drummond is captivated by the colour and texture of the African’s skin: ‘a deep full-toned brown, something like the colour of a good cigar. The whole surface is diced with a delicate pattern, which gives it great richness and beauty, and I often thought how effective a row of books would be bound in native-morocco.’⁷¹

Like Samuel Johnson in the Scottish Highlands, Drummond cannot fathom the culture of those he wishes to help ‘develop’; so they are relegated to mystified obscurity: ‘their origin is obscure, their tribal boundaries unmapped, even their names are unknown, and their languages—for there are many—are unintelligible’.⁷² It seems to make perfect sense then, that the Scottish nationalist R.B. Cunninghame

Graham used the phrase 'Imperial Kailyard' to describe British territorial expansion. For Cunningham Graham, Scottish society is rendered unintelligible by Kailyard.

His dictum that 'in dealing with Scotland and things Scotch, one should avoid sentiment',⁷³ was directed at the Kailyarders who, as contributors to a specifically liberal and imperialist political philosophy, represented all that Cunningham Graham most detested—the exploitation of the capitalist trade system, and the centripetal pull of the metropolitan 'core'. In the essay 'The Imperial Kailyard', he vilifies by parody the assumption of a Manifest Destiny for the British race, and connects exploitation in the colonial peripheries with exploitation at the metropolitan core:

No one doubts that eventually the Matabele will be conquered, and that our flag will wave triumphantly over the remnant of them, in the same way as it waves triumphantly over the workhouse pauper and the sailors' poor whore in the east end of London. Let it wave on over an empire reaching from north to south, from east to west; wave over every island, hitherto ungrabbed, on every sterile desert and fever-haunted swamp as yet unclaimed; over the sealer amid the icebergs, stripping the fur from the live seal, on purpose to oblige a lady; over the abandoned transport camel, perishing of thirst in the Soudan: and still keep waving over Leicester Square, where music halls at night belch out their crowds of stout imperialists.⁷⁴

This attack on the British Empire, at home and abroad, relies upon the symbol of the Union flag for its metaphorical import. The flag, as symbolic claim to dominion, is emptied of its ideological triumphalism by the waste over which it 'waves'. The dominion of the British Empire is one of exploitation and violent repression—even towards the animal kingdom. The commodification of Scotland into easily digestible pieces of light literature is where the Kailyard fits into the imperial matrix. Although I have tried to establish the Kailyard in a context of resistance to the hegemony of metropolitan, bourgeois formulations of identity, it is undeniable that the Kailyard construction of Scottish 'identity' seemed at odds with the reality of the moment of its production—tales of a rural past, for left-leaning contemporaries such as Cunningham Graham, represented a shameful evasion of social reality and a wilful

promotion of imperialist ideology. This ‘enthusiasm for imperialism’ is what binds the Kailyarders into the British imperialist agenda, despite their provincialist tag—indeed the marketing of the British provinces as literary commodities meets that agenda.⁷⁵

It is in J.M. Barrie’s final work, *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, that a fully deconstructive approach to the problematic of Kailyard peripherality and metropolitan/colonialist subjectivity can be found.⁷⁶ First published in 1931, *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* suggests an understanding on Barrie’s part of the ideological and artistic motivation of Kailyard; the text reveals the contradictions and ideological conditioning of the Kailyard genre more effectively than any of Kailyard’s most vehement critics.

The story’s narrator is, perhaps naturally enough for a Kailyard story, a Presbyterian minister—Adam Yestreen. In the opening pages, Yestreen defines himself by what he *is not*. The text is infused with an anxiety born of the narrator’s self-doubt; an anxiety which is released, or at least mediated, through his deployment of language.

Yestreen’s ‘Diary’ constitutes the entire text, and is written, so we are told, because ‘the English have challenged me to write’ it (*JL*, p.7). ‘The English’ hope to read his account of the haunting of the glen when it is “‘locked’”; Yestreen dismisses legends of haunting as ‘of course, superstitious havers, bred of folk who are used to the travail of out of doors, and take ill with having to squat by the sautbucket’ (*JL*, p.8). Yestreen’s affection for his fiddle which he takes ‘out of its case nows and nans to fondle the strings’ is restricted to a love for ‘the more Scottish homely lilts [...] for of course the old reprehensible songs that kow-tow to the Stewarts find no asylum with me’ (*JL*, p.9).

Immediately, then, in these opening passages, the reader is addressed by a voice which is defining itself by what it is not: not English, not superstitious, not Jacobite. The binary opposites of these terms might be ‘Scottish’, ‘rational’, and ‘Protestant-

loyalist'. The opening words of the narrative suggest a more generalized paranoia: 'This is Dec 1, 186-; I think it prudent to go no nearer to the date in case what I am writing should take an ill turn or fall into curious hands' (*JL*, p.7). The anxieties of the confident, rational, Scottish Presbyterian are betrayed by his own words. Indeed, bearing in mind that the Diary is written for the English, the question is begged: whose 'curious hands'?

As both audience and provocateurs, 'the English' are granted a privileged status. The first chapter is entitled 'The English', though it is far from being *about* them; instead, they act as a sounding board off which Yestreen's own voice and character are dialogically projected for the reader's comprehension. The affected superiority of the English is gently chided by Yestreen, yet he fails to comprehend the ways in which his own behaviour and language is conditioned by them:

The English, of course, have departed long since, and will not be seen again in the glen till next year's shooting time comes round. On the day they left they crossed over to remind me that they were looking forward to the Diary, and when I protested that I did not even know how to begin they said in their audacious way, 'You could begin by writing about us.' I have taken them at their word, though they little understand that I may have been making a quiet study of them while they thought I was the divert.

(*JL*, p.15)

Scotland figures as a playground of the English ruling class, and it is Yestreen's situation within this political reality which determines his varying identities. If, as he contends, Yestreen's diary is 'for' the English, then the linguistic mixture of Scots and English discursively registers an anxiety to be accepted by his audience of outsiders—colonizers, if we like—, while simultaneously announcing his difference from them. In one early paragraph, Yestreen talks of himself as 'but half a Highlander', and mentioning that 'there are not so many pure Hielandmen nowadays in the glen' (*JL*, p.9). 'Highlander' or 'Hieland'?—undecided on which language to use, Yestreen maintains an ambivalent identity.

Where Yestreen unconsciously allies himself with the ideology of the 'playground of the English' is in his own barely hidden contempt for the folk traditions of the locality in which he works. The minister and the doctor, two worthies of the idealized community of the Kailyard, are here represented as rational, educated and 'above' the rest of the community—much as they are represented in the Kailyard itself. However, it is these two characters who are most affected by the events of the story—the ironic narrator of the Kailyard is absent, replaced here by an anxious storyteller.

What unites Yestreen and Dr John is their desire to elide the inexplicable, a desire which itself contributes towards the minister's 'illness'. The doctor's account of a neighbour's account of a 'Stranger' arriving and aiding Joanna through childbirth is a clear example of the kind of oral tradition which Yestreen (through his attempt to write everything down) seeks to elide:

I was stout for there being some natural explanation, and he reminded me unnecessarily that there was the one Joanna gave. At this I told him sternly to get behind me.

I could not forbear asking him if he had any witting of such stories being common to other lonely glens, and he shook his head, which made me the more desperate.

He saw in what a stramash I was, and, dropping his banter, came kindly to my relief. 'Do you really think,' he said, in his helpful confident way, 'that I have any more belief in warlocks and "Strangers" than you have yourself? I'll tell you my conclusion, which my sleep makes clearer. It is that Joanna did the whole thing by herself, as many a woman has done before her. She must at some time, though, have been in a trance, which are things I cannot pretend to fathom, and have thought a woman was about her who was not there.'

(*JL*, p.45)

The doctor's 'conclusion' is echoed throughout the narrative by Yestreen. In his desperate attempt to reconcile what he experiences with what he 'knows' as a rational man, the minister's language becomes, literally, contradictory; the meaning of what he writes becomes impossible to fathom. In the brilliant final chapter, after Yestreen has himself experienced the company of the Stranger, or 'the Roman' as he

calls her on account of her Catholicism, we are confronted with a surfeit of contradiction:

I tell Mima everything except about the Roman, that being a passage in my life that never took place, nor have I sufficient intellect to be able to speak about it without doing so as if it were real. I am thankful to say that the Roman is to me as if she never had been (and of course she never was, that just being a slip of the pen).

Many a night in this part where the rain turns black as it alights, I have been out in the old top-coat without remembering how pretty she looked in it; and this is natural, for she never was in it.

I asked him, just to keep the conversation going, if any Stranger woman had been seen, but he had heard of none, nor could he, for there never was one.

(*JL*, p.80, p.82, p.83)

Yestreen's strategy for overcoming the contradiction between experience and knowledge is to willingly, and wilfully, divide his own self into 'the callant that once I was' and the 'secure and serene' minister he is 'now' (*JL*, p.87). While it is imperative to see identity as a constructed process, rather than as reified objective fact, Yestreen's binary division of his self into a past crazy young man and a present sober character denies the fundamentally social location of 'identity', its functional relativity. What the text as a whole indicates is the ways in which different formulations of what constitutes significant knowledge, in other words different ideologies, impinge upon the identity of the individual and of the social class they inhabit.

The educated, literate doctor and minister find their own assumptions confounded by the witness of folklore. Indeed, writing is itself imagined as a doubtful exercise in this story. 'Diary [...] is a word of ill omen in this manse' (*JL*, p.19), due to the murder of a predecessor Mr. H., whose own Diary entries lead Yestreen to censorship:

His entries in the Latin have made me so uneasy that I have torn out the pages and burned them. Mr. Carluke, whom I succeeded, had to confine

himself, having no Latin, to the English bits, and he treated some of them similarly for as he said to me they were about things that will not do at all.

They appear suddenly amidst matter grandly set forth, as if a rat had got at the pages.

(*JL*, p.30)

And Yestreen conceals his own writing from his housekeeper Christily, because it is written upon sermon paper; amounting to blasphemy within the Presbyterian coda. If the difference between written and spoken language is that the former is somehow more permanent, and therefore more substantial and authoritative than the latter, then this distinction is contradicted in the chapter 'The Locking of the Glen'. The power of the written word is vitiated by a 'Spectrum', a thing which reason tells Yestreen can not exist: 'To write this account of the glen when it is locked has been an effort, for the reason that I have done it twice already and in the morning it was not there' (*JL*, p.36). Discursive authority, a minister's principal tool, is denied to Yestreen; and as we read the page, the text's dubious ontological status is established in a brilliant paradox:

I sat down by lamplight on both occasions to write it and thought I had completed my task, but next morning I found just a few broken lines on otherwise blank pages. Some of them were repeated again and again like a cry, such as 'God help me', as if I were a bird caught in a trap. I am not in any way disturbed of mind or body, at any rate in the morning. Yet this was what I had written. *I am none so sure but what it may prove to be all I have written again.* (emphasis mine)

(*JL*, p.37)

The act of writing holds here no certainty of producing text, and the various contradictory strands of the narrator's anxiety cannot be resolved within the story, grounded as they are in language and the social dynamic. The slippage of meaning equates with the narrator's confusion over his own identity. The 'locked glen' stands in symbolic relation to the 'real' world outside—the world of the English, of education, and of common sense are its opposites. And Yestreen is torn between these two competing worlds, constantly re-inventing his own identity, in effect reading his own life as if it were a text, as if it were open to interpretation. For

example, when he writes, 'My name is the Rev. Adam Yestreen; and to be candid I care not for the Adam with its unfortunate associations' (*JL*, p.8), the 'unfortunate associations' might be those of a susceptibility to temptation, an unworldly innocence, or many other things associated with the biblical Adam. This does not mean that this story is an allegory—the contested ideological space within it makes it very modern in form and available meanings. However, Yestreen himself is determined to 'read' his life, and, of course, to write it.

Writing of Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*, J. Hillis Miller asserts that Hardy's characters are:

Driven by unconscious habit to make the linguistic mistake of seeing one person or situation in their lives as repeating an earlier person or situation, The mistake is linguistic because it sees things and persons not in their substantial uniqueness but as signs pointing back to earlier things or persons, 'standing for' them. Such a character makes the fundamental error of taking a figure of speech literally. He lives his life as metaphor, that is, as mistake. He imposes an interpretation on what he encounters which makes his life take, or seem to take, the form of a series of repetitions.⁷⁷

While Yestreen's reading of his own life is not as a series of repetitions, it nevertheless 'imposes an interpretation' not least in its very form of a Diary 'for the English'. It is into this gap between text and 'reality' that Barrie places his narrative; the story questions interpretations of history and identity through the conduit of the minister's 'telling' of his own story. The problematical nature of perspective, or interpretation, is foregrounded throughout *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, and any suggestion that the problem might lie simply within the narrator's character is dismissed by the interweaving of Yestreen's opinions and the 'unacceptable' stories of the glen-folk:

A thing commonly said about the Grand House is that it should be called the Grand Houses, there being in a manner two of them: though the one is but a reflection of the other in a round of water close by.

This lochy is only a kitten in size but deep; and I know not whether its unusual reflective properties are accidental, or, as some say, were a

device of olden times to confuse the enemy when in liquor. At any rate one cannot easily tell in certain lights, unless you are particular about things being upside down, which is the house and which the reflection.

There is an unacceptable tale of the lord of the glen having been tracked to the house after Culloden, and of the red-coats being lured by a faithful retainer into the water, where they tried doors and windows till they drowned, the lord and his faithful retainer keeking over the edge at them and crying 'Bo'.

(*JL*, p.66)

The tale is 'unacceptable' not merely to Yestreen's Protestant, rationalist conscience, but also to the world for which he is writing. The locked glen is a romantic setting, isolated and different; most importantly of all, it is in the past, and so seemingly denied valency. Yestreen's assertion of the difference between 'the young Adam I had been' and 'the man he became' is paralleled in the changes he notices upon revisiting the glen twenty five years later, when his relationship to the landscape and society has, he feels, changed utterly: 'The English were on the hills, but they were not my English' (*JL*, p.81). The past is reduced to a delusive fantasy, and rendered safe by this reductionism.

The locked glen may be locked out of history, but it is also re-introduced into history through Yestreen's imagination: it is rendered unsafe through the agency of his character. By dropping Julie Logan in the burn, contradiction is suppressed. The metaphor is clear: Yestreen's doubts about his own 'identity', national, religious, social and sexual, are to be drowned. But what is equally clear is that they cannot actually be made to disappear; they are submerged, only to resurface 'A Quarter of a Century' later.

The material world Yestreen inhabits in the final chapter of the story is far removed from the otherworldly glen: 'for eighteen years I have been a minister in this flourishing mining district. Two years after my call I married a lady of the neighbourhood and it has been a blessed union, for my Mima is one in a thousand and the children grow in grace' (*JL*, p.80). We are to understand this as the 'real' world of late nineteenth-century Scotland, with industry, domesticity and plenitude

as the order of the day. Yestreen has found a site for articulation and action in the urban, whereas in the rural world he was alienated from the social; Cairns Craig sees Yestreen's movement as being 'from historyless drift towards a reimmersion in the historical.'⁷⁸ In this final chapter, however, the contradictions in Yestreen's narrative are at their most active.

Yestreen's situation as a young, nervous minister in a secluded highland—or hieland?—glen, feeling unsure about his relationship with the glen-folk, 'the English', the spoken and written word, and his sexual isolation, problematizes the Kailyard paradigm of stable communities and ironic narration. The search for a stable identity, and the unsettling acknowledgement that identity is a process rather than a fixed state of being, dramatizes the narrative.

Farewell Miss Julie Logan, is perhaps the finest Kailyard text. In it the various paradigms of national, individual and class identity are interrogated and opened up to discursive displacement. Deconstructing the Kailyard, simultaneously grounded in the imperialist British state and in the differentiating ideology of the core and the periphery, Barrie's novella problematizes and opens up seemingly the most naive and sentimental of genres.

In America, Edgar Allan Poe had already questioned the peripherality of his own nation's literature, and in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* had formulated a complex textual response to the contingencies of America's own imperialist expansion. Chapter four of this thesis will consider Poe's novel and Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* in an attempt to develop my argument for a dialectical reading of the core-periphery paradigm as it is applied to notions of identity in nineteenth-century Scottish and American fiction.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. As this chapter progresses, it will become obvious that I consider many of the literary assumptions attaching to the generic label 'Kailyard' as unsatisfactory. The categorization of 'Kailyard' is a production, and reflection, of the ideologies of critical practice rather than any imminent meaning in the 'Kailyard' texts themselves. Hopefully this thesis goes some way to addressing this fact.

However, for ease of reference, I have employed the term 'Kailyard', and derivatives such as 'Kailyarders' and 'Kailyardism', to signpost a known group of writers and books from the late nineteenth-century. From here on, these terms will not be in quotation marks, as it ought to become clear that 'so-called' might be interjected before each use of the label 'Kailyard'. Additionally, in this thesis the word Kailyard should not be read in the pejorative sense in which it was first coined by J.H. Millar in 1895; a negative appellation which most subsequent critics—until very recently, and these not always *literary* critics—have been all too happy to follow.

2. The reaction against Kailyardism in Scottish literature is wide and varied, however it is necessary to mention by name here the three greatest narrative counterblasts to the form. Much Scottish writing in this century—at least in fiction—has some determinants in George Douglas Brown's *The House with The Green Shutters* (1901), James MacDougall Hay's *Gillespie* (1914), and 'Grassic Gibbon's' *A Scots Quair* trilogy (1932-4). We will see how simplistic it is to read Brown's novel, for example, as anti-Kailyard.

3. Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London, 1979), p.128.

4. *A Companion to Scottish Culture*, edited by David Daiches (London, 1981), p.196.

5. T.W.H. Crosland, *The Unspeakable Scot* (London, 1902).

6. T.W.H. Crosland, *The Unspeakable Scot*, p.75.

7. George Blake, *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (London, 1951), p.13.

8. T.C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830*, second edition (London, 1970), p.497.

9. William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: language, fiction and the press* (Aberdeen, 1986), p.147.

10. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p.17.

11. James Leatham, *John Galt, the First of the Kailyarders: a Neglected Man of Genius, and Why*, (n.d.), p.5.
12. James Leatham, *John Galt, the First of the Kailyarders*, p.6.
13. David Macbeth Moir, *The Life of Mansie Wauch: Tailor in Dalkeith* (1828; rpt. Edinburgh, 1868). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *MW*.
14. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character: From Oliver Goldsmith to Sylvia Plath* (London, 1983), p.65.
15. Susan Manning, 'Scotland and America: national literatures? national languages?', *Cencrastus*, 32 (New Year 1989), 41-46 (p.44).
16. Elizabeth H.A. Robson, *Preparations for a study of Metropolitan Scots of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century as exemplified in 'Mansie Wauch,' by David Macbeth Moir, the "Delta" of 'Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Edinburgh, 1937), p.5.
17. James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (Montreal, 1979), p.20.
18. James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, p.15.
19. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), p.38.
20. Henry W. Meikle, *Glasgow and the French Revolution* (Glasgow, 1912), p.7.
21. John Gibson Lockhart, *Some Passages in the Life of Mr. Adam Blair Minister of the Gospel at Cross-Meikle*, edited by David Craig (Edinburgh, 1963). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *AB*.
22. For example, see 'On the Cockney School of Poetry, No.1', *Blackwood's Magazine*, II (October 1817).
23. Alan Rogers, 'American Democracy: The View from Scotland, 1776-1832', *Albion*, 6, no. 1 (Spring 1974), 63-71 (p.69).
24. Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History*, Pimlico edition (London, 1992), pp.390-1.
25. National Library of Scotland, MSS 1552, fols 7-9.
26. National Library of Scotland, MSS 1552, fols 7-9.

27. Quoted in Marion Lochhead, *John Gibson Lockhart* (London, 1954), p.107.
28. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (1970; rpt. London, 1992), p.248.
29. Ian Campbell, *Kailyard* (Edinburgh, 1981), p.16.
30. John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, single volume edition (Edinburgh, 1842), p.481.
31. Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (Montreal, 1978), p.107.
32. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, introduction by Tony Tanner (London, 1967), p.113.
33. Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989).
34. Alexander Somerville, *The Autobiography of a Working Man*, edited with an introduction by John Carswell (London, 1951), p.15.
35. Tom Nairn, 'The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism', in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, edited by Karl Miller (London, 1970), pp.34-54 (pp.45-6).
36. Robert Mudie, *The Modern Athens* (London, 1825), pp.167-8
37. Hugh Miller, 'Letter to Brougham', in *Hugh Miller: Outrage and Order*, edited by George Rosie (Edinburgh, 1981), p.117.
38. James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (Montreal, 1979), p.89.
39. Young is quoting from Catherine Sinclair's *Scotland and the Scotch* (Edinburgh, 1840), p.112.
40. William Alexander, *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk, in the Parish of Pyketillim: with Glimpses of the Parish Politics about A.D. 1843*, second edition (Aberdeen, 1871). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed JG.
41. William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, pp.101-144.
42. Alexander Mackie, introduction to *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk, in the Parish of Pyketillim*, by William Alexander, fifteenth edition (Edinburgh, 1908), p.vii.

43. Susan Manning, 'Scotland and America: national literatures? national languages?', *Cencrastus*, 32, pp.41-46; and, *The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990); Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992) .
44. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (1983; rpt. London, 1989), p.76.
45. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), p.39.
46. William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p. 143.
47. William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p.147.
48. In writing of 'post-Kailyard' I follow Ian Campbell's assertion in his book *Kailyard* that Gibbon and Brown 'are in many senses writing kailyard' (p.98); they problematized Kailyard, as postmodernist writers have problematized modernist paradigms.
49. J.B. Pick, *The Great Shadow House* (Edinburgh, 1993), p.45.
50. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p.17
51. George Blake, *Barrie and the Kailyard School*, p.79.
52. Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, 'Inferiorism', *Cencrastus*, 8 (Spring, 1982), 4-5
53. J.M. Barrie, *Auld Licht Idylls* (London, 1889). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *ALI*.
54. George Blake, *Barrie and the Kailyard School*, p.58.
55. George Blake, *Barrie and the Kailyard School*, p.13.
56. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: a pure woman* (1978; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1982), p.404.
57. James Young argues that between 1750 and 1780, Scotland underwent as much economic growth, relatively, as England had undergone in two centuries, so the effects upon workers attitudes and ability to adapt must have been massively different. *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, pp.45-6
58. J.M. Barrie, 'Thomas Hardy: The Historian of Wessex', *Contemporary Review*, 56 (July-December 1889), 57-66 (p.59).

59. Lewis Grassie Gibbon, in *Scottish Scene: or, the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albany*, by Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid (London, 1934), p.245.

60. Hugh Miller, *Outrage and Order*, p.110.

61. Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh, 1996), p.39.

62. Ian Campbell, *Kailyard*, p.117.

63. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991), p.3.

64. Edwin Morgan, 'The Beatnik in the Kailyard' in his *Essays* (Cheadle, 1974), pp.166-176 (p.169).

65. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, edited by Pam Morris (London, 1994), p.50:—

'Everything ideological possesses *meaning*: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. *Without signs there is no ideology*. A physical body equals itself, so to speak; it does not signify anything but wholly coincides with its particular, given nature. In this case there is no question of ideology.

However, any physical body may be perceived as an image; for instance, the image of natural inertia and necessity embodied in that particular thing. Any such artistic-symbolic image to which a particular physical object gives rise is already an ideological product. The physical object is converted into a sign. Without ceasing to be a part of the material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality.'

66. Letter of 24 Oct 1901, quoted in James Veitch, *George Douglas Brown* (London, 1952), p.153.

Regarding *The House with the Green Shutters*, however, Brown rejects the idea that it is an anti-Kailyard novel: 'those who hint that I've deliberately set myself to say "black" whenever Barrie and Maclaren say "white", are talking burble. It was not for its own sake that I painted Barbie so, but because of its effect on the Gourlays. It was the elder and younger Gourlay I was trying to get inside the heads of.' Quoted in Veitch, *George Douglas Brown*, p.156.

67. Ian Carter, 'Kailyard, The Literature of Decline in Nineteenth Century Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Sociology*, 1 (November 1976), 1-13 (p.5).

68. Thomas D. Knowles, *Ideology, Art and Commerce: Aspects of Literary Sociology in the Late Victorian Scottish Kailyard* (Gothenburg, 1983), p.63.

69. Henry Drummond, *Nyassaland: Travel-Sketches in Our New Protectorate* (London, 1890), p.v.
70. Henry Drummond, *Nyassaland*, pp.17-18.
71. Henry Drummond, *Nyassaland*, pp.57-8.
72. Henry Drummond, *Nyassaland*, p.58.
73. R.B. Cunninghame Graham, letter of 1898, quoted in Laurence Davies, 'R.B. Cunninghame Graham: The Kailyard and After', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol XI, 3 (January 1974), pp.156-177 (p.157).
74. R.B. Cunninghame Graham, *The Imperial Kailyard* (London, 1896), pp.14-15.
75. Christopher Harvie, "'Behind the Bonnie Brier Bush': The Kailyard Revisited", *Proteus*, 3 (June 1978), 55-70 (p.66).
76. J.M. Barrie, *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (Edinburgh, 1989). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *JL*.
77. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford, 1982), p.13.
78. Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, p.57.

Chapter 4

Poe, Dana, and the Authority of Language

Edgar Allan Poe makes it clear throughout his fictional and critical writing that the political and ideological determinants of language are of prime importance in accounting for literary histories. In Poe's critical writings in particular, emphasis is placed on the various forms in which language—and hence, literature—registers political struggles between nations and classes, and how the literary marketplace becomes a prime site for these struggles. As a prolific and contentious journalist and editor, Poe was fully aware of the contested nature of language and of literary paradigms.

If American writers suffered any 'anxiety of influence' from 'English' writers such as Scott and Wordsworth, it was expressive, Poe argued, of a broader political dimension—the postcolonial search for a national identity, accompanied by and formed by a native idiolect. Paradoxically, Poe was also adamant that the overt political content of literary writings should have no bearing upon their critical reception—an opinion which his own anti-Abolitionist viewpoint would perhaps suggest in order to second-guess any criticism of his own poetry and prose.

In an article from *Graham's Magazine*, 1842, Poe expresses in strident language a hermeneutic aesthetic:

A book is written—and it is only *as the book* that we subject it to review. With the opinions of the work, considered otherwise than in their relation to the work itself, the critic has really nothing to do. It is his part simply to decide upon *the mode* in which these opinions are brought to bear. Criticism is thus no 'test of opinion.' For this test, the work, divested of its pretensions as an art-product, is turned over for discussion to the world at large—and first, to that class which it especially addresses—if a history, to the historian—if a metaphysical treatise, to the moralist. In this, the only true and intelligible sense, it will be seen that criticism, the

test or analysis of Art, (not of opinion,) is only properly employed upon productions which have their basis in art itself, and although the journalist (whose duties and objects are multiform) may turn aside, at pleasure, from *the mode* or vehicle of opinion to discussion of the opinion conveyed—it is still clear that he is ‘critical’ only in so much as he deviates from his true province at all.¹

The point is clear. That literature is a discrete form of articulation and that the literary critic should only pay attention to it *as* literature. Poe writes of ‘*the mode* or vehicle of opinion’, as isolated elements of the poem or prose-piece; elements which can, and ought to be, studied to the exclusion of the ideological import of the writing. The problem with this analysis is that it presumes literary ‘modes’ to be free of ideology, untainted by cultural practices and existing in a extra-material world of their own. As if literature and its tropes were somehow God-given, or ‘natural’. From this passage, Poe appears to be a literary idealist, interested in the literary text as a separable object; a kind of precursor to Yale New Criticism

However, the review from which this passage is taken is part of a broader attack by Poe upon a specific literary practice; and it is an attack grounded in politics. Complaining that much American criticism, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was little more than ‘generalized’ commentary, Poe identifies the British Periodical press as the damaging archetype, and the fact that ‘we seem merely to have adopted this bias [for generalization] from the British Quarterly Reviews, upon which our own Quarterlies have been slavishly and pertinaciously modeled’ (*E&R*, pp.1028-9). This argument is supported, though in a more positive manner, employing the paradigmatic word ‘tradition’, by William Brock in his authoritative and exhaustive reference work *Scotus Americanus*. Writing of the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, he states that it ‘was to become an arbiter of American opinion. In its early years the Review was a literary rather than a political journal, but its popularity in America opened a new phase in Scottish-American intellectual history. Building upon a tradition established by Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, the Scottish critics guided literary taste’.²

The overbearing influence of the British over the American literary press is one aspect of a wider established hegemony in literature, a hegemony analogous to 'law or empire'. In arguing this point, Poe seems to be in harmony with more recent academics and critics who have stressed the extent to which British—and particularly Scottish in many cases—cultural practices and ideologies were taken up wholesale in America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To quote William Brock again: 'for a majority of educated Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century, "philosophy" meant "Scottish philosophy" and little else'.³

Writing in 1836 in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe states: 'You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established; for it is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession' (*E&R*, p.6) Locating the American writer beyond the magic circle of the literary establishment, Poe here articulates what was to become Walt Whitman's major concern: the search for an American literary idiom. It is in Poe's critical writings, however, that the full contradictions of such a search are made manifest. While the subservient following of British models is certainly reviled, the concept (and the actuality, at times) of an American 'national literature' is ridiculed:

Time was when we imported our critical decisions from the mother country. For many years we enacted a perfect farce of subserviency to the *dicta* of Great Britain [...] At last a revulsion of feeling, with self-disgust, necessarily ensued. Urged by these, we plunged into the opposite extreme. In throwing totally off that 'authority,' whose voice had so long been so sacred, we even surpassed, and by much, our original folly. But the watchword now was, 'a national literature!'—as if any true literature *could* be 'national'—as if the world at large were not the only proper stage for the literary *histrion*. We became, suddenly, the merest and maddest *partizans* in letters.

(*E&R*, p.1028-9)

Poe dismisses James Fenimore Cooper's writing, and it is both a pointed and ironic dismissal as it was Cooper (see chapter 1 of this thesis) who led the way in trying to give America a usable and historical literary landscape:

Among all the pioneers of American literature, whether prose or poetical, there is not one whose productions have not been much over-rated by his countrymen. But this fact is more especially obvious in respect to such of these pioneers as are no longer living,—nor is it a fact of so deeply transcendental a nature as only to be accounted for by the Emersons and Alcotts [...] is there any one so blind as not to see that Mr. Cooper, for example, owes much, and that Mr. Paudling owes *all* of his reputation as a novelist, to his early occupation of the field? Is there any one so dull as not to know that fictions which neither Mr. Paudling nor Mr. Cooper could have written, are daily published by native authors without attracting more of commendation than can be crammed into a hack newspaper paragraph. And again, is there any one so prejudiced as not to acknowledge that all this is because there is no longer either reason or wit in the query,—‘Who reads an American book?’ [...]. We have, at length, arrived at that epoch when our literature may and must stand on its own merits, or fall through its own defects. We have snapped asunder the leading-strings of our British Grandmamma, and better still, we have survived the first hours of our novel freedom,—the first licentious hours of a hobbledehoy braggadocio and swagger. At last, then, we are in a condition to be criticised—even more, to be neglected.

(*E&R*, pp.404-5)

Elsewhere, Poe aims his critical barbs at the inferiorism of American criticism—its sense of being second-rate in comparison to British culture: ‘nothing can be plainer than that our position, as a literary colony of Great Britain, leads us into wronging, indirectly, our own authors by exaggerating the merits of those across the water [...] undue reverence for British intellect and British opinion’ (*E&R*, p.1044). The word ‘colony’ immediately politicizes this so-called aesthetic point; the ‘undue reverence’ is a manifestation of cultural hegemony. Thomas Hamilton, an English writer of the time, makes the same point from the opposite point-of-view, that of the literary colonizer:

Unless the present progress of taste be arrested by an increase of taste and judgment in the more educated classes, there can be no doubt that, in another century, the dialect of the Americans will become utterly unintelligible to an Englishman, and that the nation will be cut from the advantages arising from their participation in British literature.⁴

The condescension in this passage, its overt assimilation—or colonization, if we follow Poe—of American literature into ‘British literature’, expresses the degree to which the political animosity between Britain and America lasted well beyond the signing of the American Declaration of Independence and was mediated in diverse cultural forms.

We can read the last passage as an example of what Poe called ‘the slander’ perpetrated against American writers, when he specifies the historical conditions under which Cooper, and Poe himself, write as Americans:

That we are not a poetical people has been asserted so often and so roundly, both at home and abroad, that the slander, through mere dint of repetition, has come to be received as truth. Yet nothing can be farther removed from it [...].

The idiosyncrasy of our political position has stimulated into early action whatever practical talent we possessed. Even in our national infancy we evinced a degree of utilitarian ability which put to shame the mature skill of our forefathers. While yet in leading-strings we proved ourselves adept in all the arts and sciences which promote comfort of the animal man. But the arena of exertion, and of consequent distinction, into which our first and most obvious wants impelled us, has been regarded as the field of our deliberate choice. Our necessities have been mistaken for our propensities. Having been forced to make rail-roads, it has been deemed impossible that we should make verse. Because it suited us to construct an engine in the first instance, it has been denied that we could compose an epic in the second. Because we were not all Homers in the beginning, it has been somewhat too rashly taken for granted that we shall be all Jeremy Bentham's to the end.

(*E&R*, p.549)

Rejecting the separation of science and art, Poe insists that it is the ‘idiosyncrasy of our political position’—the existence of the newly independent America at a time of huge capitalist expansion and industrial invention—which is responsible for its overwhelmingly materialist and mercantile culture. Melville similarly had complained about the refusal of his English publisher to believe that a sailor could also understand Shakespeare (see Chapter 2, note 7 of this thesis). The understanding of cultural processes here is profoundly historical at every level; for Poe is not only recognizing the cumulative nature of artistic creation—the artist's dependency on

previous modes of expression for models—but also the fact that literary texts and other aesthetic productions *are* produced. In drawing an analogy between the ‘making’ of railroads and poetry, Poe insists upon the rootedness of writing in the material world. Regardless of the reception of a text—which he did assert should be ‘a matter of time and of mental exertion’ (*E&R*, pp.1028-9)—its production, for Poe, is very much a matter of labour. The ‘Philosophy of Composition’, for example, can be read as an extreme, and probably ironic, example of the constructedness of literary language, as can ‘How to Write a Blackwood Article’ with its do-it-yourself title.

Poe’s historical conception of language and literature was recognized, and championed, by William Carlos Williams, in distinctive idiom in his 1925 book *In The American Grain*. For Williams, Poe was a literary pioneer bringing on ‘a juvenescent local literature’, and it is interesting that he chooses to emphasize the importance of Poe’s critical and evaluative writings in the development of a specifically *American* idiom: ‘the language of the essays is a remarkable HISTORY of the locality he springs from’⁵. For Williams, language functions not merely as a means of communicating non-linguistic realities, but is itself historically material. The *how* of meaning is as important as the *what*.

The metaphor of ‘grain’ recurs throughout the essay on Poe, expressing as it does Williams’s conception of literature as both a product of a specific environment, and as a material reality. In arguing that Poe ‘clears the ground’ and ‘turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of Boone’, Williams equates writing with agriculture and industry, and, in Poe’s instance, with pioneering expansion.⁶ The idea, and ideal, of America as an undiscovered, and unlimitedly discoverable, land has been discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis and will be further looked at later in this chapter, yet it is worth noting here that well into the twentieth century a poet such as Williams could still be employing this language.

Poe’s triumph, for Williams, is that he rested control of language from his literary forebears in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Poe’s writing declares linguistic

independence by taking possession of the 'tools' of European culture, and using them 'to original purpose. This is his anger against Longfellow', that that poet did not. And by so using the cultural shackles of European domination for the winning of independence, Poe established a true culture 'in the American grain':

This is culture; in mastering them, to burst through the peculiarities of an environment. It is NOT culture to oppress a novel environment with the stale, if symmetrical, castoffs of another battle. They are nearly right when they say: Destroy the museums! But that is only the reflection, after all, of minds that fear to be slavish. Poe could look at France, Spain, Greece, and NOT be impelled to copy. He could do this BECAUSE he had the sense within him of a locality of his own, capable of cultivation.⁷

Poe colonizes the colonialists. And it is his specificity which gives his writing the power to do this. As I hope to show in the rest of this chapter, it is in the explication of both material history and textual multiplicity that Poe's writing is most fully realized. That the independent 'democratic' America was founded upon, and sustained, by its own forms of political and cultural expansionism means that Poe's doubleness in his writing carries a peculiar resonance as an ideological marker—the monolithic paradigm of the pioneering American, self-sufficient in its individuality, and original in its motivations, is interrogated in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and other shorter works, and its points of vulnerability exposed.

William Carlos Williams is right to attack the received picture of Poe as a weird fantasist, and he reserves particular criticism for the lack of esteem given to Poe by Americans: 'Americans have never recognized themselves. How can they? It is impossible until someone invents the ORIGINAL terms. As long as we are content to be called by somebody's else terms [sic], we are incapable of being anything but own dupes'⁸—power resides in language, and it is this power which Poe grabs from the Europeans, but too many Americans do not. Poe's genius, for Williams, is this ability to take control and to understand the materiality and historicity of language:

It is only that which is under you nose which seems inexplicable.

Here Poe emerges—in no sense the bizarre, isolate writer, the curious literary figure. On the contrary, in him American literature is anchored, in him alone, on solid ground.

In all he says there is a sense of him surrounded by his time, tearing at it, ever with more rancor, but always at battle, taking hold.⁹

In *An American Primer*—which might be read as a precursor to Williams's book—first published in 1904 but written during the 1850s and 1860s, Walt Whitman also figures language, and by extension literature, in material and environmental terms. America, like other countries is seen, by Whitman, as being sown with language, yet America is weakened by having only the offcasts of other cultures and languages:

[America is] covered with the weeds and chaff of literature.

California is sewn thick with the names of all the little and big saints. Chase them away and substitute aboriginal names [...] the great proper names used in America must commemorate things belonging to America and dating thence.—Because, what is America for?—To commemorate the old myths and the gods?—To repeat the Mediterranean here? Or the uses and growths of Europe here?—No;—(Na-o-o) but to destroy all those from the purposes of the earth, and to erect a new earth in their place.¹⁰

Like Poe and, later, Williams, Whitman emphasizes the historical specificity of words and their meanings, recognizing that language encodes and enacts structures of power, authority and identity. By throwing off the language of Britain, and its European connotations, Whitman envisioned an American idiom which would reflect the actuality of his nation, empowering it culturally and politically. And in rejecting the idea of language as pre-ordained or part of the 'natural' world, he gives full emphasis to the *on-going* eventfulness of language, to its diachronic capacities: 'Words are not original and arbitrary in themselves.—Words are a result—they are the progeny of what has been or is in vogue'.¹¹

Of particular significance for this thesis is Whitman's comment regarding his major poem *Leaves of Grass*: 'How much I am indebted to Scott no one can tell—I couldn't tell it myself—but it has permeated me through and through. If you could reduce the Leaves to their elements you would see Scott unmistakably active at the roots'.¹²

Leaves of Grass, perhaps the American declaration of literary independence, is seen by its writer as having its 'roots' in the folk tradition as promoted by Walter Scott, and again the metaphor connects to the land and its produce.

For Whitman, as for Williams, language is a human expression of the national character and of the national topography—American land is again the focus for an ideological figuring of national identity. Like Whitman's poetry, *An American Primer* invokes the 'plenteousness' of America through dauntless listing of place-names and features: 'American geography,—the plenteousness and variety of the great nations of the Union the thousands of settlements—the seacoast—the Canadian north—the Mexican south—California and Oregon—the inland seas—the mountains—Arizona—the prairies—the immense rivers'.¹³

Holding up the nation's economic geography as a sign of its independence, Whitman's rhetoric contains hints of the 'Manifest Destiny' of the American republic of which he was such an avid supporter in the years leading up to and during the Civil War. When this piece was written in the early 1850s, Whitman considered 'the Mexican South' and 'the Canadian north' as legitimate targets for incorporation into the Union—for Whitman, the benefits of American democracy were too good to be missed even by those who did not want them. The religious justification for the concept of Manifest Destiny—of God's will being the expansion of the United States—undergoes metamorphosis into a humanist championing of the benefits of American liberty.

It is worth noting that Whitman was to change his views on American expansionism and to express isolationist sentiments towards the end of his life. In his memoir of times spent with the poet, Horace Traubel writes:

Sunday March 31, 1889:— Of the German and American fleets at Samoa—three vessels each—four were absolutely wrecked and destroyed and the other two stranded in a typhoon. This was in the morning's papers. W. spoke of it: 'It was a dreadful disaster—dreadful!' Then, pursuing the subject: 'It was a wonderful and curious spectacle anyhow—

the United States having the vessels there at all: for my part I should say, let me go about my own business undisturbed: not a word shall I say or a step take till I am interfered with—till my freedom is invaded: and what I offer for the individual—to me as a person—I should apply to our government as well: let us stay at home—mind and mend our own affairs.’¹⁴

By the time of this statement, 1889, America was a world power both militarily and economically, and engaging in its own acts of imperialist aggression. What *An American Primer*, begun some forty years earlier, makes clear is that the capacity to realize a national identity and then to impose the national will upon other nations is dependent upon the existence of a national idiom—language, for Whitman, is power, whether it be personal or collective. When he sings his ‘Song of Myself’ in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman is attempting to sing himself into agency; to realize his own subjectivity. But he is also attempting to create an American subjectivity—a voice befitting the new democratic nation, although it is important to remember that the proclaimed ‘newness’ of America was itself an ideological construct, a ‘version of the past [...] intended to connect with and ratify the present’.¹⁵ This newness naturally relied upon the suppression and repression of contesting American identities—a fact to be looked at in more detail later in this chapter.

Contained in *An American Primer* is a clear account of the privileged position which language holds in the contested arena of power:

Names are the turning point of who shall be master.—There is so much virtue in names that a nation which produces its own names, haughtily adheres to them, and subordinates others to them; leads all the rest of the nations of the earth.—I also promulge that a nation which has not its own names, but begs them of other nations, *has no identity*, marches not in front but behind.’¹⁶ [emphasis mine]

For Whitman, identity is constituted in language; and words are themselves direct and material realizations of social and political conflict. If the United States is to claim for itself nationhood, then it must have its own words which are expressive of this nationhood, with which its citizens can *identify*:

American writers are to show far more freedom in the use of words.—Ten thousand native idiomatic words are growing, or are to-day already grown, out of which vast numbers could be used by American writers, with meaning and effect—words that would give that taste of identity and locality which is so clear in literature.¹⁷

And what is claimed for 'nations' can also be claimed for classes, genders and races—the power to name is the power to control. The texts which I shall be looking at in this chapter delineate a recurrent emphasis upon authority and language in nineteenth-century American writing, and open up interesting questions about the contradictory impulses for 'independence' and for the subordination of others. Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), a story which critics have variously regarded as either an exercise in psychology or an open attack upon the humanity of black slaves and the sanity of the Abolitionists, is read in this thesis as a text which is paradigmatic of the ironic possibilities of literary language.

Even an account such as the present one, which seeks to adhere to the texts for material, rather than biographical accounts of the author, must not discount the fact that Edgar Allan Poe *was* opposed to the abolition of slavery, that he did not believe in democratic principles and certainly scorned the ability of his fellow citizens to make sensible political decisions based upon the claims of corrupt huckstering politicians. Poe's open contempt for the theory and practice of American democracy, described by the French poet, and famous Poe admirer, Baudelaire as 'torrents of scorn and disgust upon democracy, progress, and civilization', is mediated in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* as ironic authorial detachment.¹⁸

The ironic distance between Misters 'Poe' and 'Pym' provides more than an 'insight' into Poe's personal beliefs. Opening up to critical appraisal the paradigm of American individualism, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* destabilizes the partly linguistic constructs of identity and authority. In the process, the vile system of American slave-holding is projected as a specific, and particularly brutal, manifestation of social authority. Far from excusing the American slave trade, the

dynamics of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*'s rhetoric and narrative indict both it and the broader socio-economic system it inhabited.

Poe's infamous 'review of two books on abolition, [in 1836, in which] he listed as the special stigmata by which God distinguished the race that were to become slaves, he "blackened the negro's skin and crisped his hair into wool"' is read in this thesis as not only symptomatic of Poe's own, and many fellow white American's feelings, but also as informing his fiction and poetry.¹⁹ So this thesis's contention that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* actually deconstructs significant elements of imperialist, racist and capitalist ideologies, and American variants of these ideologies in particular, is not to argue that the extra-literary is irrelevant, but on the contrary that it determines the ways in which the literary text mediates the ideologies which it inhabits.

Louis Althusser puts it thus:

What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing', 'perceiving' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of *knowing*), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes [...] Balzac and Solzhenitsyn give us a 'view' of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a retreat, an internal distancing from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us 'perceive' (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which they are held.²⁰

Because it has its ideological grounding in antebellum America, and specifically in the connected dogmas of racism and imperialism, Poe's text produces parallels and symbolic resonances, analogous motivations concealed in the peculiarly American paradigms of the pioneering individual and the slave-holding democrat.

Identity—whether personal, national, racial or class—figures in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* as a structuring concept. From Arthur's own individual crises, to the wider manifestations of American imperialist 'destiny', the narrative

problematizes both the general concept of identity, and the specific determinants of nineteenth-century American individualism. One recent critic claims that: 'Pym's account is finally of nothing more enduring than his own disappearance from it. An adventure story making total oblivion at work in every act of his will, *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* is not an adventurer's account but a narrated instance of the obliteration of a person', an appropriate point on which to open my reading of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.²¹

For Arthur Gordon Pym, the character, identity is constituted as a literary trope; it is the role one plays which one is. The ideal of the individual, able to live a unified, discrete existence, expressing free-will and with a settled 'identity', is made untenable in this text. In the account of an early sailing adventure with his friend Augustus, Arthur's subjectivity is radically subverted; he becomes an object of his own discourse:

The body of a man was seen to be affixed in the most singular manner to the smooth and shining bottom (the 'Penguin' was coppered and copper-fastened), and beating violently against it with every movement of the hull. After several intellectual efforts, made during the lurches of the ship, and at the imminent risk of swamping the boat, I was finally disengaged from my perilous situation and taken on board—for the body proved to be my own. It appeared that one of the timber-bolts having started, and broken a passage through the copper, it had arrested my progress as I passed under the ship, and fastened me in so extraordinary a manner to her bottom. The head of the bolt had made its way through the collar of the green baize jacket I had on, and through the back part of my neck, forcing itself out between two sinews and just below the right ear.²²

Arthur sees himself as others see him, as 'the body of a man' disconnected from his own consciousness. Objectified as a 'body', as a material thing able to be commodified, Arthur is in a position analogous to that of a caught whale—literally bolted to the bottom of the boat, he is completely at the mercy of others, and of accident. This is a very early, and quite clear, example of the 'obliteration' of Arthur's individuality mentioned by the critic cited above; the emphasis is upon contingency and negation of personal agency. The contingent nature of the material

world is read by Arthur as Providential—he understands the restriction on his own free-will not as a sign of interdependence and a social dynamic, but as proof of the pre-destined course of his life, and, of course, his ‘narrative’.

It is as a record of his personal manifest destiny, that Arthur’s narrative is contrived; however, the ironies of discourse, and the mutability of signification, makes problematic any such manifest reading. Arthur may very well see his life story as somehow pre-ordained, but the reader is made only too aware of Arthur’s capacity for mistakes and misreadings of the material world. It is also important to note that Arthur’s frequent recourse to disguise and misleading statements is emblematic of the difficult relationship between cause and effect which the novel mediates—the text has specific ideological determinants in nineteenth-century American society, yet at the same time insists upon the heterogeneity of narrative, of the ways in which the telling of a story can undermine its observable content. The general observation that Poe ‘admits opposing perspectives simultaneously, thus dissolving in the text the very limits by reference to which identity, however unstable, may determine itself’, is particularly apposite to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.²³

Arthur’s future is prefigured in his youthful reveries as:

Visions [...] of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires—for they amounted to desires—are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men; at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfill. Augustus thoroughly entered into my state of mind. It is probable, indeed, that our intimate communion had resulted in a partial interchange of character.

(*AGP*, p.13)

This ‘state of mind’, one of brooding melancholy and hypersensitivity, is a rhetorical trope of the Romantic imagination; in adopting such an aesthetically-constituted persona, Arthur projects himself into the world as a product of literary

representations—it is not, then, surprising that Augustus ‘thoroughly entered’ into it, as such an ‘identity’ is available for each individual to adopt.

Throughout *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, individual ‘character’ is revealed to be a matter of adopted positions and actions, not innate qualities. When, in his desire to live out his prophesied future, his ‘destiny’, Arthur employs an ‘intense hypocrisy [...] an hypocrisy pervading every word and action of my life for so long a period of time’, it is readily clear that the idea of a knowable individual identity is being probed by this text. For Arthur, his own identity is as Romantic adventurer, playing a pre-ordained role. In his recent excellent study of American literary Romanticism, Scott Bradfield emphasizes the acts of interpretation which underscore Arthur’s narrative: ‘Arthur never explores the world so much as imagines it. Drifting in the reverie of bedtime tales and nightmarish visions, buried beneath the surfaces of ships and continents, Arthur invents the world far more than he ever experiences it. Arthur isn’t interested in either wealth or knowledge so much as tempted by aesthetic intensity’.²⁴

The fragmentation of Arthur’s ‘self’, begun very early in the narrative in his ‘partial interchange of character’ with Augustus, reaches an apotheosis when he dresses up as a dead crew-member, to frighten the mutineers and thus overcome them in their momentary confusion. Adept at ‘hypocrisy’, Arthur plays the role of dead sailor, secure in the knowledge that it is appearances which matter, not depths, in the material world:

As soon as I got below I commenced disguising myself so as to represent the corpse of Rogers. The shirt which we had taken from the body aided us very much, for it was of singular form and character, and easily recognizable—a kind of smock, which the deceased wore over his clothing.[...].

As I viewed myself in a fragment of looking-glass which hung up in the cabin, and by the dim light of a kind of battle-lantern, I was so impressed with a sense of vague awe at my appearance, and at the recollection of the terrific reality which I was thus representing, that I was seized with a violent tremor, and could scarcely summon resolution to go on with my part.

As in the description of Arthur's bolting to the bottom of the *Penguin*, the human form is objectified. Representing 'the corpse of Rogers', simply a matter of donning the dead man's 'singular [...] easily recognizable' shirt, Arthur voids himself of a subjective identity and adopts in its place a purely objective representation of an inanimate object. His disguise works, and, due to 'the excellence of the imitation in my person', 'in the minds of the mutineers there was not even the shadow of a basis upon which to rest a doubt that the apparition of Rogers was indeed a revivification of his disgusting corpse, or at least its spiritual image' (AGP, pp.66-7). The effect is what counts for Arthur, the production of the effect is a matter of representation and imitation—of the ability to efface one's own appearance and replace it with another's.

Later in the novel, Arthur is himself fooled by distant appearances into believing the death-ridden Dutch brig to be a saviour:

No person was seen upon her decks until she arrived within about a quarter of a mile of us. We then saw three seamen, whom by their dress we took to be Hollanders. Two of these were lying on some old sails near the forecastle, and the third, who appeared to be looking at us with great curiosity, was leaning over the starboard bow near the bowsprit [...] I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they appeared to us.

The brig came on slowly, and now more steadily than before, and—I cannot speak calmly of this event—our hearts leaped up wildly within us, and we poured out our whole souls in shouts and thanksgiving to God for the complete, unexpected, and glorious deliverance that was so palpably at hand.

(AGP, p.80-1)

However, Pym and his fellow survivors are brought to an understanding of the reality by the olfactory sense, as 'all at once, there came wafted over the ocean from the strange vessel (which was now close upon us) a smell, a stench, such as the whole world has no name for—no conception of—hellish—utterly suffocating—insufferable, inconceivable' (AGP, p.81). The raw materiality of the decomposing

bodies on the drifting ship makes for an 'inconceivable' and unnameable stench; the objective fact, as opposed to the Romantic ideal, of death has invaded Arthur's world-view.

The Dutch sailors' decomposing flesh becomes a sign, mediating Arthur's insistence upon a Providential design in his narrative. A 'huge sea-gull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh', carries the sign for Arthur, placing responsibility for Parker's subsequent murder and cannibalization beyond Arthur himself. The bird's actions are interpreted as marking out Parker for death—so that Parker's subsequent drawing of the 'short-straw' is simply a fulfillment of his destiny:

As the brig moved further round so as to bring us close in view, the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and, after eying us for a moment as if stupefied, arose lazily from the body upon which it had been feasting, and, flying directly above our deck, hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak. The horrid morsel dropped at length with a sullen splash immediately at the feet of Parker. May God forgive me, but now, for the first time, there flashed through my mind a thought, a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step towards the ensanguined spot. I looked upward, and the eyes of Augustus met my own with a degree of intense and eager meaning which immediately brought me to my senses. I sprang forward quickly, and, with a deep shudder, threw the frightful thing into the sea.

(*AGP*, p.82)

The determining effect of circumstance and contingency upon 'identity' suggests a further eradication of the subjective-objective paradigm of humanist ideology. So 'utterly emaciated' are Dirk Peters and Augustus, that Arthur finds himself unable to 'believe them really the same individuals with whom I had been in company but a few days before'. And although Arthur insists that he retained his 'powers of mind in a surprising degree, while the rest were completely prostrated in intellect, and seemed to be brought to a species of second childhood, generally simpering in their expressions, with idiotic smiles, and uttering the most absurd platitudes', he also permits that he may well have acted much like them without realizing it, though 'this is a matter which cannot be determined' (*AGP*, p.88). In this passage self-

assurance becomes self-doubt, which later in the narrative Arthur stresses as being the product of the specific situation in which they found themselves: 'it must be remembered that our intellects were so entirely disordered, by the long course of privation and terror to which we had been subjected, that we could not justly be considered, at that period, in the light of rational beings' (*AGP*, p.105).

In discursive terms, it is irony which assails Arthur's rhetorical self-assurance; a mediation of his Romanticist ideology, Arthur's narrative cannot settle upon an empirical standpoint from which to judge itself. The exploitation of the ironic potentialities of literary discourse is crucial to Poe's narrative art—and to that of Hawthorne and Melville, Galt and Stevenson; it positions the texts in the material, historical world (in which opposing ideologies compete for material dominance) yet gives them a measure of autonomy from the strict forms of that world, forms which they investigate through the dynamics of language.

One recent critic writes of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, that it 'challenges whatever authenticity, or truth-value, the narrator might lend to his narrative by putting in question the narrator's self—that is, his ability to stand outside his own system of representation, total and present to himself'.²⁵ This radical deconstruction of the subjective-objective paradigm suggests a particularly coherent reading of the 'matter which cannot be decided' as a pointer to the insistent structural and narrative ambiguities of the text. This novel is full of matters which cannot be decided. They cannot be decided not only because of 'the late sudden and distressing death of Mr. Pym', prior to publication, and 'that the few remaining chapters which were to have completed his narrative [...] have been irrecoverably lost through the accident by which he perished himself'—although even this, 'may prove not to be the case'—but also because of the variable relationship between textual discourse and concrete realities.

The contested nature of identity, that it is always in mediation, is symbolically represented by the mirrors in Captain Guy's cabin aboard the *Jane Guy*, the British

ship which ultimately rescues Arthur and Dirk Peters from the wreckage of the *Grampus*. Arthur's earlier shock at his own appearance as the corpse of Rogers is mirrored in the reaction of Too-wit, the 'savage' chief, upon seeing his almost simultaneous reflection in 'two large mirrors':

He had got in the middle of the cabin, with his face to one and his back to the other, before he fairly perceived them. Upon raising his eyes and seeing his reflected self in the glass, I thought the savage would go mad; but, upon turning short round to make a retreat, and beholding himself a second time in the opposite direction, I was afraid he would expire upon the spot.

(*AGP*, p.133)

The first mirror gives Too-wit a discrete and objectifiable impression of himself, which unsettles him; yet his almost simultaneous perception of the second reflection completely throws him. Reproducing in multiple, the mirrors remove the essentialist ideal of origin and replace it with the dynamic of appearance and multiplicity—'putting in question' Too-wit's self. Too-wit is witness to his own 'duplicity': 'the doubleness of experience. How can we tell the reality from its mirror, the world from its picture in a work of art, the image from the image of the image? Poe [...] sees that all our passions, intuitions, thoughts, are susceptible of inversion, may become their opposites.'²⁶

Once contact is established between the white men aboard the *Jane Guy*, and the black inhabitants of Tsalal, a dialectic of identity becomes more insistent as an organizing narrative and rhetorical structure. It is in the contestable world of material economic exploitation that Arthur Gordon Pym discovers a subjectivity as one of two 'only living white men upon the island', and it is this ideologically determined discourse which I will now address.

Reading Poe's January 1836 review of a new edition of *Robinson Crusoe* for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the American writer's admiration for Defoe's landmark text of the realist canon can not be doubted; and it is an admiration expressed specifically for two facets of Defoe's book. Firstly, 'the spirit of wild

adventure enkindl[ed] within us' by its account of a 'desolate island'; and, secondly, 'the potent magic of [its] verisimilitude [...] which enables the mind to lose its own, in a fictitious, individuality' (*E&R*, pp.201-2). Poe's admiring words provide pointers to the cultural determinants of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and suggest the discursive efficacy which Poe sought in his own novel.

To read *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* as a straightforward political tract defending the American slave trade, or as a univocal racist parable—Biblical in all essential reference points—has been something of a norm in critical responses to the text. The problem with this very worthy, but I believe misconceived, reading of Poe's book, is that it simply replaces one unitary ideology with another. In citing *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* as a crucial text in the ideological annals of antebellum American racism, many critics have ignored its potential as a forceful critique of American 'democracy' as fundamentally exploitative and imperialist. It is very convenient for the upholders of the American canon to mark out Poe's novel as a wayward, aberrant text—thus reinforcing the validity of the hierarchy they have established, and to protect the values held dear by American 'democracy' from the harsh critical light thrown upon them by *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and other works of the antebellum period.

I write this particular chapter bearing in mind Russell Reising's admonishment that 'future critics and theorists of American literature would do well to address the struggle of American criticism to suppress the social and political significance of American texts'.²⁷ Poe's well-documented support for slavery has its 'social and political significance', but so too does his attack upon the hypocrisies and myths of the American socio-economic system. In the *Robinson Crusoe* review, Poe laments the lack of 'desolate islands' for western adventurers of his own times to 'discover':

Alas! the days of desolate islands are no more! 'Nothing farther,' as Vapid says, 'can be done in that line.' Wo, henceforward, to the Defoe who shall prate to us of 'undiscovered bournes.' There is positively not a square inch of new ground for any future Selkirk. Neither in the Indian, in the Pacific, nor in the Atlantic, has he a shadow of hope. The Southern

Ocean has been incontinently ransacked, and in the North—Scoresby, Franklin, Parry, Ross, Ross & Co. have been little better than so many salt water Paul Prys.

(*E&R*, pp.201-2)

This has been read, alongside some of Poe's other work, as indicative of his personal desire for America's westward and southward expansion. Be this as it may, what it is, more importantly, is a record of the *actual* economic and military practice of the western powers; and, in Poe's age, America numbered among these. To write of Poe, as Harold Beaver does in his informative and committed foreword to the Penguin edition of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, that 'as a Virginian in the 1830s he was obsessed not only by Antarctic fantasies but racial fantasies, not only by polar expeditions but a black-white polarity that was riddling the whole nation with tension' is to ignore the fact that not only Virginians held slaves, that not only slave-owning states conspired to keep the system running—and, most importantly, that what for Poe may have been 'fantasies' were, for the American government, specific economic and political practices.²⁸

Beaver's conclusion that 'Poe deliberately played on Southern hysteria, by suggesting that blacks, far from timid, were both a sly and warlike people' and that there is in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* 'a vague, mysterious sense of horror that Poe indulges—not merely as a backlash to Northern propaganda, but part of a wider, surreptitious exposition of white supremacy',²⁹ can be compared with some words of a speech delivered by the ex-slave and leading Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, at Rochester, New York, on July 5th, 1852:

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts side by side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for a revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.³⁰

For Douglass, *all* the constituted authorities of North America are implicated in the slave-holding of the southern states; and the dependency of both the northern states

and the economies of other countries upon the cheapness of this American labour is pointedly made in H. Bruce Franklin's brilliantly acerbic history of *Prison Literature in America*: 'Slavery [...] went through a fundamental change around 1830, completing its evolution from a predominantly small-scale, quasi-domestic institution appended to handtool farming and manufacture into the productive base of an expanding agricultural economy, utilizing machinery to process the harvested crops and pouring vast quantities of agricultural raw materials, principally cotton, into developing capitalist industry in the northern states and England.'³¹

In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, we encounter a litany of imperialist activity, expressive of the reality of the increasing hegemony of white America over both non-white America and the Pacific regions to its south. It is as a literary mediation of American expansionism both within and without its national borders that the novel attains its fullest meanings—it needs to be read not as a psychological case history or as a source of clues to Poe's individual neuroses and bigotry, but as symptomatic of the ideological world from which it comes—the world of imperialist aggression and economic expansionism. And it is its very literariness, its split narrative and questioning of subjectivism which make *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* crucially ambiguous in its way of telling its meanings. To make specific my reading of this novel as a critique of capitalist expansionism, I wish to concentrate on one particular aspect of the narrative—the analogous behaviour of the mutineers and the 'legitimate' traders.

Dirk Peters, who becomes Arthur's side-kick (at least in Arthur's eyes) 'was the son of an Indian woman of the tribe of Upsakoras, who live among the fastness of the Black Hills, near the source of the Missouri. His father was a fur-trader, I believe, or at least connected in some manner with the Indian trading-posts on Lewis river' (*AGP*, p.38). A symbolic representation of the incursion of the European settlers into America, Peters suggests a direct link between the predominance of trade and the use of violence on the American continent—the 'connected in some manner' leaves, as is

so often the case in this novel, much to conjecture. And Peters is instrumental in convincing the mutineers of the best route to property and pleasure:

There now seemed to be two principal factions among the crew—one headed by the mate, the other by the cook. The former party were for seizing the first suitable vessel which should present itself, and equipping it as some of the West India Islands for a piratical cruise. The latter division, however, which was the stronger, and included Dirk Peters among its partisans, were bent upon pursuing the course originally laid out for the brig into the South Pacific; there either to take whale, or act otherwise, as circumstances should suggest. The representations of Peters, who had frequently visited these regions, had great weight apparently with the mutineers, wavering as they were between half-engendered notions of profit and pleasure. He dwelt on the world of novelty and amusement to be found among the innumerable islands of the Pacific, on the perfect security and freedom from all restraint to be enjoyed, but, more particularly, on the deliciousness of the climate, on the abundant means of good living, and on the voluptuous beauty of the women.

(*AGP*, pp.45-6)

Convincing the crew to head south, Peters holds up a promise of consumerism in which land, as opposed to the 'piratical' sea, offers 'abundant' commodities, including 'the women'. One recent critic makes the point well that Peters' significance as a type is anchored in the milieu of nineteenth-century imperialist practice: 'like Native Americans who scouted for and fought with the U.S. Cavalry against tribal foes in the course of Manifest Destiny, like the East Indian Sepoys who fought faithfully for the British in India, Dirk Peters exemplifies one common "colonial solution" to the problem of a native population: subjugation by way of ideological conversion';³² although Peters' racial mix complicates this further. And Peters' integration into Pym's world-view is completed when they are 'the only living white men upon the island' (*AGP*, p.151).

Between the aims of the mutineers under the guidance of Peters, and those of the British trader *Jane Guy* under the command of Captain Guy, there is little to differentiate:

Captain Guy was a gentleman of great urbanity of manner, and of considerable experience in the southern traffic, to which he had devoted a great portion of his life. He was deficient, however, in energy, and consequently in that spirit of enterprise which is here so absolutely requisite. He was part owner of the vessel in which he sailed, and was invested with discretionary powers to cruise in the South Seas for any cargo which might come most readily to hand.

(AGP, p.108)

Like the mutineers, Captain Guy finds in 'the southern traffic' endless bounty and prosperity; the exploitability of the Pacific islands renders them as stores of commodities for the western trader, equipped as he is with firearms and capital. It is the ironic distance between the narrating Arthur and the multiple textual resonances between mutineers and traders, 'savages' and those representing 'the cluster of symbols called "civilization"' ³³, which make *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* a critical demystification of western imperialism, rather than a homily in praise of it. What matters for this thesis is not Poe's supposed reasons for undertaking this critique, so much as the concrete textual manifestation of that critique. Even a critic as responsive to the radical elements of Poe's writing as Scott Bradfield resorts to the vagaries of discussing the writer's psyche in the course of delivering a fair estimation of the novel itself: 'Poe's dream of unlimited westward expansion is simultaneously a nightmare [...] Poe believes it leads to nothing but destruction'. ³⁴

Reading Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1839) alongside Poe's novel, the dehumanizing processes of sea-going trade are brought into sharp focus—and the mutiny aboard the *Grampus* is understood as more than an expression of 'basic human perversity'. ³⁵ As Captain Ahab employs the rhetoric of authority as a cogent symbol of his arbitrary power aboard the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick*, so Captain Thompson in Dana's autobiographical account represents and reproduces the power structures of the economic system which he inhabits—the ship, the *Pilgrim*, is a microcosm of the world of capitalist trade, not a metaphor for it.

Dana's narrative explains the correlation between the order aboard the ship and the order of the capitalist world. The role of authority and of subordination within these

commensurate hierarchies is laid bare in *Two Years Before the Mast*. Introducing himself to his crew, Thompson emphasizes the arbitrary nature of his power:

‘If we get along well together, we shall have a comfortable time; if we don’t, we shall have hell afloat.—All you’ve got to do is to obey your orders and do your duty like men,—then you’ll fare well enough,—if you don’t, you’ll fare hard enough,—I can tell you. If we pull together, you’ll find me a clever fellow; if we don’t, you’ll find me a *bloody* rascal.—That’s all I’ve got to say.—Go below, the larboard watch!’³⁶

We note the immediate giving of an order, testing Thompson’s summation of the situation. It is when the nature of these ‘duties’, and the social system in which they are carried out, are interrogated in the narrative, that the Captain’s dismissive “‘All you’ve got to do is to obey your orders’” attains its fullest alienating force. Captain Thompson’s literally ‘bloody’ rule aboard the *Pilgrim* is shown to be not a random and accidental result of his personal psychology, but a material manifestation of the arbitrary powers invested in him by the laws of the capitalist world. Dana insists that the *Pilgrim* is an average trading ship, operating under ‘the duties, regulations, and customs of an American merchantman, of which ours was a fair specimen’ (*TYB*, p.50). To obey orders is the crew’s first duty; and to give them, the Captain’s feudal privilege:

The captain, in the first place, is lord paramount. He stands no watch, comes and goes when he pleases, and is accountable to no one, and must be obeyed in everything, without a question, even from his chief officer. He has the power to turn his officers off duty, and even to break them and make them do duty as sailors in the fore-castle. Where there are no passengers and no super-cargo, as in our vessel, he has no companion but his own dignity, and no pleasures, unless he differs from most of his kind, but the consciousness of possessing supreme power, and, occasionally, the exercise of it.

(*TYB*, p.50)

Captain Thompson’s violent assault later in the narrative is, therefore, not an aberration but in fact a specific ‘exercising’ of his ‘supreme power’—the physical expression of a hierarchical power structure, a structure constructed to serve the ends of capital.

The 'solitary command' bemoaned by Ahab is prefigured in Dana's earlier narrative. Importantly, in Captain Thompson's conscious likening of himself to a slaver—the irony of a Captain, aboard a trading ship serving the markets of 'Democratic' America, proudly declaiming his inhumanity must not be elided, for it is not only ironic. The exercise of arbitrary power, the commodification of the sailor into a labouring hand who 'cared nothing for the cargo, which we were only collecting for others' (*TYB*, p.143), and the alienating working conditions in which 'it is the officers' duty to keep every one at work, even if there is nothing to be done but to scrape the rust from the chain cables. In no state prison are the convicts more regularly set to work, and more closely watched. No conversation is allowed among the crew at their duty' (*TYB*, p.53); all these things materially demonstrate the systematic connections between the American Slave Trade and the workings of capitalist 'enterprise', specifically in its sea-trade where 'America's vast ocean commerce was based on a condition of servitude halfway between [Southern] chattel and [Northern] wage labour.'³⁷

The 'chain cables' form part of the material prison for the crew, and in this sense they might be read as symbols of their imprisonment. In Frederick Douglass's story 'The Heroic Slave', the chains which imprison the slaves aboard ship are transformed by the slaves' act of rebellion into weapons for liberty—an example of the transformation of a commonly recognized symbol (chains as symbolic of slavery) into a different symbol (that of the power to oppose tyranny): 'My men have won their liberty, with no weaponry but their *Broken Fetters*'.³⁸

In Dana's book, it is the captain's whipping of two sailors which most forcefully expresses the nature of the social relationship aboard a trading ship in the early nineteenth century. The reader is not permitted to indulge in mere sentimental pity for the whipped sailors, but is required to understand the social structures giving Thompson the *authority and opportunity* to whip—rather than the individual psychology of Captain and crew members. Even the 'first duty' of the sailor, to

follow orders, is rendered irrelevant by the arbitrary indulgence of the captain's power:

'Have I ever refused my duty, sir? Have you ever known me to hang back, or to be insolent, or not to know my work?'

'No,' said the captain, 'it is not that that I flog you for; I flog you for your interference—for asking questions.'

'Can't a man ask a question here without being flogged?'

'No,' shouted the captain; 'nobody shall open his mouth aboard this vessel, but myself;' and began laying the blows upon his back, swinging half round between each blow, to give it full effect. As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck, calling out as he swung the rope,—'If you want to know what I flog you for, I'll tell you. It's because I like to do it!—because I like to do it!—it suits me! That's what I do it for!'

The man writhed under the pain, until he could endure it no longer, when he called out, with an exclamation more common among foreigners than with us—'Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!'

'Don't call on Jesus Christ,' shouted the captain; '*he can't help you. Call on Captain T[hompson]*. He's the man! He can help you! Jesus Christ can't help you now!'

(TYB, p.155)

Removing the last prop of a Christian, the American trader insists upon the primacy of the material, of the here-and-now; in the world-as-it-is, he, '*Captain Thompson*', has power. The moral emptiness of this specific exertion of authority—'It's because I like to do it!'—is expressive of the superficial veneer of 'civilization' adopted by the burgeoning Western trading powers. When captain Thompson claims for himself the mantle of slave-driver, it effectively describes the systemic organization of the American economic order of the day. Far from proclaiming the dignity of all humans, and the cause of Abolition, Thompson emphasizes the contempt in which the hegemonic order holds the subordinates; a contempt which seeks to equalize labour *in the direction of slavery*:

Every one else stood still at his post, while the captain, swelling with rage and with the importance of his achievement, walked the quarter-deck, and at each turn, as he came forward, calling out to us,—'You see your condition! You see where I've got you all, and you know what to expect!'—'You've been mistaken in me—you didn't know what I was!

Now you know what I am!’—‘I’ll make you toe the mark, every soul of you, or I’ll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy, up!’— ‘You’ve got a driver over you! Yes, a *slave-driver*—a *negro-driver*! I’ll see who’ll tell me he isn’t a negro slave!’

(*TYB*, pp.155-6)

In Poe’s story, the black cook, one of the leaders of the mutiny aboard the *Grampus*, declares that Augustus would be locked in the fore-castle, “until the brig was no longer a brig”, thus seizing on language as the symbolic expression of power. And, in Douglass’s ‘The Heroic Slave’, it is not Madison Washington’s actions in leading the rebellion on the slave ship which amazes the narrating white sailor, so much as his control of language, and his own name: “The name of this man, strange to say, (ominous of greatness,) was MADISON WASHINGTON.[...] It was a mystery to us where he got his knowledge of language.”³⁹

Washington expresses the ideological import of words, their grounding in historical contingency:

“We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they”.

[...]To the sailors in the rigging he said: “Men! the battle is over,—your captain is dead. I have complete command of this vessel. All resistance to my authority will be in vain. My men have won their liberty, with no weaponry but their *Broken Fetters*. We are nineteen in number. We do not thirst for your blood, we demand only our rightful freedom. Do not flatter yourselves that I am ignorant of chart or compass. I know both. We are now only sixty miles from Nassau. Come down, and do your duty.”⁴⁰

The ‘fathers’ of American Independence are claimed by Douglass’s text as a legitimizing trope: ‘if we are murderers, so were they.’ And in many public speeches, Douglass would purposively employ the ‘language’ of the American Revolution against the society which it created. Demanding a black subjectivity, contesting the ownership of language, Douglass ‘declares’, ‘with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting.’⁴¹ In this way, Douglass fulfills what

Scott Bradfield describes as ‘the anxiety Americans felt the day they realized they had inherited not only a powerful revolutionary propaganda but a vastly brooding slave population which might ask to borrow it sometime.’⁴²

Telling the crew that their ‘duty’ is now to obey him and sail to a safe port, Washington inhabits the identity of the conquering general who places captured prisoners under his own command. Investing his physical authority with linguistic legitimacy, Washington uses this legitimacy to reinforce the physical situation and to underline the contested nature of authority: ““if you now (seeing I am your friend and not your enemy) persist in your resistance to my authority, I give you fair warning, you *Shall Die*.’”⁴³

The mate’s language implicitly recognizes the legitimacy of Washington’s authority, in that the former re-employs a figurative phrase of Washington’s. Rejecting a fellow white man’s accusation of cowardice for allowing a successful slave-rebellion aboard his ship, the mate says ““It is one thing to manage a company of slaves on a Virginia plantation, and quite another thing to quell an insurrection on the lonely billows of the Atlantic, where every breeze speaks of courage and liberty””; this echoes Washington’s injunction (later in the narrative but earlier in ‘time’), ““Mr. mate, you cannot write the bloody laws of slavery on those restless billows. The ocean, if not the land, is free’”⁴⁴.

In both Dana’s book and Poe’s the sea is represented as an extension, in terms of law, of the land. Its forms of authority deriving from there. The law of the sea is simply an extension of the law of the land, in which property rights are paramount—‘what is there for sailors to do? If they resist, it is mutiny; and if they succeed, and take the vessel, it is piracy. If they ever yield again, their punishment must come; and if they do not yield, they are pirates for life. If a sailor resist his commander, he resists the law, and piracy or submission are his only alternatives’ (*TYB*, pp.153-4).

In his landmark *Studies in Classic American Literature*, first published in 1923, D.H. Lawrence reads the whipping episodes from *Two Years before the Mast* as expressions of Dana's American-ness. To be American is, for Lawrence, to believe in the 'ideal': 'He is a servant of civilization, an idealist, a democrat, a hater of masters, a KNOWER'.⁴⁵ This is valuable assessment of the proprietorial ideology of American democracy—its belief that 'civilization' can transcend the natural world and 'know' it. It is this positivist ideology which Melville does so much to deconstruct in *Moby-Dick*. However, for Lawrence, it is Dana's hatred of 'masters' which is his folly—where Poe sees in American Democracy sham hypocrisy, with exploitation masquerading as liberty and equality, for Lawrence it is the ideology of equality itself which is offensive.

The relationship between captain and crew, a specific relationship whose economic determinants are spelled out by Dana, is rendered by Lawrence as a quasi-mystical expression of an unspecified universal human condition; and the flogging is a 'natural' part of that condition:

The man Sam has a new clear day of intelligence, and a smarting back. The Captain has a new relief, a new ease in his authority, and a sore heart.

There is a new equilibrium, and a fresh start. The physical intelligence of a Sam is restored, the turgidity is relieved from the veins of the Captain.

It is a natural form of human coition, interchange.

It is good for Sam to be flogged. it is good, on this occasion, for the Captain to have Sam flogged. I say so.⁴⁶

Lawrence completely misses the point that the violence is only possible because of the specific social system operating aboard the ship—a system which the captain himself acknowledges allows him to act as a slave driver. And the flogging, having done 'good' to both sailor and captain, is only spoiled, for Lawrence, by the intrusion of Dana's moral sense: 'Sam got no more than he asked for. It was a natural event. All would have been well, save for the *moral* verdict. And this came from theoretic idealists like Dana and the seaman John, rather than from the sailors themselves'.⁴⁷

Lawrence's implication is that the sailors, gloriously and 'naturally' free of the finer feelings of intellectual 'moral idealists', know their place and agree with the system. But Dana has given the exact reason why sailors obey their captain: 'if a sailor resist his commander, he resists the law' (TYB, p.153-4).

However, in both Dana's book and in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the capacity of the colonizing trading ships to impose their economic order meets resistance from within the crew and the indigenous populations. In Poe's novel, the death of the Jane Guy's crew (all except for Pym and Dirk Peters) follows their attempt to impose their system of production there; and in *Two Years Before the Mast*, Dana records the intransigence of the Sandwich Islanders to the Captain's invocations of the capitalist ethic of work-and-accumulate:

The captain offered them fifteen dollars a month, and one month's pay in advance; but it was like throwing pearls before swine, or, rather, carrying coals to Newcastle. So long as they had money, they would not work for fifty dollars a month, and when their money was gone, they would work for ten.

'What do you do here, Mr. Mannini?' said the captain.

'Oh, we play cards, get drunk, smoke—do anything we're a mind to.'

'Don't you want to come aboard and work?'

'*Aole! aole make make makou i ka hana*. Now, got plenty money; no good, work. *Mamule*, money *pau*—all gone. Ah! very good, work!—*maikai, hana hana nui!*'

'But you'll spend all your money in this way,' said the captain.

'Aye! me know that. By-'em-by money *pau*—all gone; then Kanaka work plenty.'

This was a hopeless case, and the captain left them, to wait patiently until their money was gone.

(TYB, pp.200-1)

Dana's narrative is self-reflexive of American Democratic ideology. It propounds the ideology, while simultaneously opening it up for questioning. As a sailor aboard a trading ship, he experiences the privations which the system imposes on those it exploits, and feels a commonality with the slaves and the Islanders. The crew of the ship, he comes to understand, can identify more readily with the other exploited peoples (who subvert the rules of the wage-labour game by declining to work when

they have sufficient to live on), than with their ostensible compatriots who own and sail the vessel. Dana's narrative ironizes the myth of American trading excellence, revealing the working practices which look like one thing but are in fact another, more simple and material thing:

Sunday, Oct. 4th. This was the day of our arrival; and somehow or other, our captain always managed not only to sail, but to come to port, on a Sunday. The main reason for sailing on the Sabbath is not, as many people suppose, because Sunday is thought a lucky day, but because it is a leisure day. During the six days, the crew are employed upon the cargo and other ship's works, and the Sabbath, being their only day of rest, whatever additional work can be thrown into Sunday, is so much gain to the owners. This is the reason of our coasters, packets, &c. sailing on the Sabbath. They get six good days' work out of the crew, and then throw all the labor of sailing into the Sabbath. Thus it was with us, nearly all the time we were on the coast, and many of our Sabbaths were lost entirely to us. The Catholics on shore have no trading and make no journeys on Sunday, but the American has no national religion, and likes to show his independence of priestcraft by doing as he chooses on the Lord's day.

(*TYB*, p.260)

As Horace Traubel notes, even Walt Whitman, the literary champion of American democracy, and a promoter of its 'Manifest Destiny' to spread the word of that new faith, later in his life realized the fundamental arrogance underlying such expansionism.⁴⁸ In Poe's novel, it is Arthur Pym himself who evangelizes upon the mission of American economic hegemony; Captain Guy, we notice, is 'deficient, however, in energy, and consequently in that spirit of enterprise which is here so absolutely requisite'. Not Arthur Pym. His rhetoric is that of the entrepreneur, of the self-made man; he might be an exemplar of de Tocqueville's American sailor or man of commerce: 'the American [...] sets sail while the storm is still rumbling; by night as well as by day he spreads full sails to the wind. [...] Doing what others do but in less time, he can do it at less expense'. Of the sacrifice (often of others) made in the cause of profit, de Tocqueville adds: 'Throughout a voyage of eight or ten months he has drunk brackish water and eaten salted meat; he has striven continually against the sea, disease, and boredom; but on his return he can sell tea a farthing cheaper than an English merchant can: he has attained his aim'.⁴⁹

When Captain Guy considers turning back from their southward journey, the contrast which Arthur Pym seeks to make with his own worldly and enterprising self could not be more stark, or more proselytizing:

I confess that I felt myself bursting with indignation at the timid and ill-timed suggestions of our commander. I believe, indeed, that what I could not refrain from saying to him on this head had the effect of inducing to push him on. While, therefore, I cannot but lament the most unfortunate and bloody events which immediately arose from my advice, I must still be allowed to feel some degree of gratification at having been instrumental, however remotely, in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention.
(*AGP*, pp.129-130)

To read this passage, saturated as it is in the expansionist ideology of 'Manifest Destiny', and to read earlier in the same paragraph how 'we had now advanced to the southward more than eight degrees farther than any previous navigators, and the sea still lay perfectly open before us', is to read of the all-encompassing nature of that ideology—how science and economy interconnect in an overwhelming capacity and desire for knowledge and ownership. The connections between these practices is clearly expressed in the title to a government paper famously reviewed by Poe; the paper's name is the 'Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs, to whom was referred memorials from sundry citizens of Connecticut interested in the whale fishing, praying that an exploring expedition be fitted out to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas. March 21, 1836' (*E&R*, p.1227).

In his review, Poe supports the American expedition because, he writes, 'our pride as a vigorous commercial empire, should stimulate us to become our own pioneers in that vast island-studded ocean, destined, it may be, to become, not only the chief theatre of our traffic, but the arena of our future naval conflicts' (*E&R*, p.1231). Yet this seemingly unalloyed advocacy of American naval expansionism is problematized by his admission in a private letter to his friend James Lowell, in 1844, that the idea of 'progress', which lies at the root of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, is a sham:

I live continually in a reverie of the future. I have no faith in human perfectibility. I think that human exertion will have no appreciable effect upon humanity. Man is now only more active—not more happy—nor more wise, than he was 6000 years ago. The result will never vary—and to suppose that it will, is to suppose that the foregone man has lived in vain—that the foregone time is but the rudiment of the future—that the myriads who have perished have not been upon equal footing with ourselves—nor are we with our posterity. I cannot agree to lose sight of man the individual, in man the mass.—I have no belief in spirituality. I think the word a *mere* word. No one has really a conception of spirit. We cannot imagine what is not.⁵⁰

Not only does this passage express Poe's final sense of the hollowness of western civilization, it also articulates his conviction of the materiality of the human condition and the emptiness of metaphysical philosophies of the 'spirit'; a thing which 'is not'. The insistence that 'I cannot agree to lose sight of man the individual in man the mass' has been taken by some critics as an indication of Poe's detestation of both democracy and the working classes in particular;⁵¹ however, I read it, within the anti-positivism of the rest of the letter, as a demand that 'the present' is afforded recognition beside the past. The emphasis, if we read the passage in its full meaning, is surely upon 'equal footing' rather than any supposed aristocratic values of Poe's.

Returning with a heightened awareness of Poe's ironic intent to the specific account of western expansionism in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, we can read with more caution Arthur's certainty that the land to the south will not be 'the sterile soil met with in higher Arctic latitudes' and they must continue, not only for this economic opportunity but also because 'so tempting an opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to an Antarctic continent had never yet been afforded to man', where the universalist abstraction 'man' might gloss as 'white, European or American man'. As one critic has pointed out, Pym sees his own narrative in terms of previous explorers' accounts; 'accounts in which the act of discovery (the penetration of *terra incognita* and the consequent extension of the limits of human knowledge) is a function of inscription.[...] What "discovery" means in this context is the Antarctic's entrance into the written memory of written historical man, that being

whose cultural self-consciousness is a function of contemplating his inscribed image through the course of recorded time.’⁵²

Pym’s pronouncement that he ‘felt [him]self bursting with indignation at the timid and ill-timed suggestions of our commander,’ is a rhetorical manifestation of Manifest Destiny; all its facets are there: expansionism, mapping, exploitation and violence. Pym is comfortable in his role as the unseasoned explorer—above all enthusiastic and brave and therefore pioneering; and Captain Guy serves as the reluctant professional—British and unwilling to take risks. The different cultures and ecological systems encountered are viewed as opportunities for deracination and profiteering, and also as a diversionary entertainment for western science—an ‘intensely exciting secret’.

To reduce such historically-expressive prose to the level of personal psychology illuminates neither the book itself or, by the way, its author. It is surprising that a critic as ideologically-conscious as John Carlos Rowe should write of ‘the immaterial, poetic world of Poe’s writing and the material history from which it flees’.⁵³ Less surprisingly, Daniel Hoffman argues that ‘the direction of Poe’s mind, the thrust of his imagination is—may I restate the obvious?—away from the body and toward the spirit, away from the “dull realities” of this world, toward the transcendent consciousness on a “far happier star.” His protagonists are all attempting to get out of the clotted condition of their own materiality, to cross the barrier between the perceptible sensual world and that which lies beyond it’.⁵⁴

Arthur Pym’s account of the naval party’s dealings with the South Sea inhabitants speaks not of an attempt ‘to get out of the clotted condition of [his] own materiality’, but of a desire to inhabit the material world of the southern seas and to occupy that geographical area with the specific ideological symbols of capitalist enterprise; to add the South Seas to what Poe, at his most boasting, called America’s ‘accumulated stock of commercial and geographical knowledge’ (*E&R*, p.1232). Even Pym’s apparently sympathetic account of the natives’ visit to the *Jane Guy*, during which

‘we saw no disposition to thievery among them, nor did we miss a single article after their departure’ (*AGP*, p.134), only serves to point up the discrepancy between the assumed rights of the explorers to ‘discover’ and ‘possess’, and the judgment that ‘savages’ ‘steal’. Thomas Paine’s serious insistence in *Common Sense* that ‘we are not insulting the world with our fleets and armies, nor ravaging the globe for plunder’ is ironized by Poe’s novel. By the time of *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s publication, America had discovered the benefits of such plundering.⁵⁵

Like Robinson Crusoe, Arthur Pym itemizes the material world as possessable objects—the search for ‘any articles which might be turned to account in the way of traffic’ (*AGP*, p.134) is recorded in the form of an account book in places:

We had no difficulty in procuring almost every kind of refreshment which we required; sheep, hogs, bullocks, rabbits, poultry, goats, fish in great variety, and vegetables were abundant.

We saw, during our visit, a quantity of dried salmon, rock cod, blue dolphins, mackerel, blackfish, skate, conger eels, elephant-fish, mullets, soles, parrot-fish, leather-jackets, gurnards, hake, flounders, paracutas, and innumerable other varieties.

(*AGP*, p.118, p.138)

And Pym places himself deliberately at the centre of this exploitative practice, as the representative of American pioneerism. Cajoling the captain into agreeing that ‘even in the event of our finding *beche de mer*, we should only stay here a week to recruit, and then push on to the southward while we might’ (*AGP*, p.134).

In his drive southwards, Pym is analogous to the white European settlers colonizing the American West in the early and mid-nineteenth century, and it is in the itemizing and proliferation of material produce that the discursive analogy resides:

When the European population begins to approach the wilderness occupied by a savage nation, the United States government usually sends a solemn embassy to them; the white men assemble the Indians in a great plain, and after they have eaten and drunk with them, they say: ‘What have you to do in the land of your fathers? Soon you will have to dig up

their bones in order to live. In what way is the country you dwell in better than another? Are there not forests and marshes and prairies elsewhere than where you live[...]?' That speech finished, they spread before the Indian firearms, woolen clothes, kegs of brandy, glass necklaces, pewter bracelets, earrings and mirrors. If, after the sight of all these riches, they still hesitate, it is hinted that they cannot refuse to consent to what is asked of them and that soon the government itself will be powerless to guarantee them the enjoyment of their rights.⁵⁶

De Tocqueville emphasizes that the 'civilizing' imperialist practice of white America is more successful than the brutal means of the Spanish Empire, who, 'by unparalleled atrocities which brand them with indelible shame, did not succeed in exterminating the Indian race and could not even prevent them from sharing their rights; the United States Americans have attained both these results with wonderful ease, quietly, legally, and philanthropically, without spilling blood and without violating a single one of the great principles of morality in the eyes of the world. It is impossible to destroy men with more respect to the laws of humanity'.⁵⁷

Like Pym, the American pioneers went 'quietly spreading over these fertile wildernesses whose exact resources and extent they themselves do not yet know. Three or four thousand soldiers drive the wandering native tribes before them; behind the armed men woodcutters advance, penetrating the forests, scaring off the wild beasts, exploring the course of rivers, and preparing the triumphal progress of civilization across the wilderness'.⁵⁸ However, the *Jane Guy* needs no forward army, the crew carrying their own 'frontier' weaponry: 'armed to the teeth, having with us muskets, pistols, and cutlasses, besides each a long kind of seaman's knife, somewhat resembling the bowie-knife now so much used throughout our western and southern country' (*AGP*, p.146).

The purpose of the voyage, profiteering, is admitted by Pym, and the specific formulation of capitalist working practices, in which labour is divided in order to maximize output, is illustrated clearly: 'we commenced a series of cross-questionings in every ingenious manner we could devise, with a view of discovering what were the

chief productions of the country, and whether any of them might be turned to profit' (AGP, p.140).

Crucially, the opportunity to 'turn' things to profit relies upon the availability of an exploitable labour force, and in the islanders, it appears, the *Jane Guy* has found one:

Finding the ease with which the vessel might be loaded with *beche de mer*, owing to the friendly disposition of the islanders and the readiness with which they would render us assistance in collecting it, Captain Guy resolved to enter into negotiation with Too-wit for the erection of suitable houses in which to cure the article, and for the services of himself and his tribe in gathering as much as possible, while he himself took advantage of the fine weather to prosecute his voyage to the southward. Upon mentioning this project to the chief, he seemed very willing to enter into an agreement. A bargain was accordingly struck, perfectly satisfactory to both parties, by which it was arranged that, after making the necessary preparations, such as laying off the proper grounds, erecting a portion of the buildings, and doing some other work in which the whole of our crew would be required, the schooner should proceed on her route, leaving three of her men on the island to superintend the fulfilment of the project, and instruct the natives in drying the *beche de mer*. In regard to terms, these were made to depend upon the exertions of the savages in our absence. They were to receive a stipulated quantity of blue beads, knives, red cloth, and so forth, for every certain number of piculs of the *beche de mer* which should be ready on our return.

(AGP, p.142)

Believing they have brought 'the savages' into their own economic system, as labour, the crew of the *Jane Guy* fatally misread the relationship. Unwilling to enter into the bargain, 'the islanders for whom we entertained such inordinate feelings of esteem [prove to be] among the most barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe' (AGP, p.145).

Edwin Fussell makes the point that the white 'explorers', in their desire for 'turning' things to 'traffic', carry out acts of wanton violence: 'we must understand that black Indians (with Polynesian overtones) are by no means the only savages in the book. So far as deception, treachery, and pointless butchery are concerned, the white man is in every respect their equal'. Arthur Pym's revulsion at the natives' violence is

hypocritical rhetoric—‘Pym is sanctimoniously voluble’. As Fussell remarks, ‘It is the Americans [...] who engage in cannibalism’.⁵⁹

As the voice of expansionist America, Arthur Pym is keen to represent the inhabitants of Tsalal as mysteriously and violently alien. Pym’s ‘sanctimoniously voluble’ rhetoric is a discursive marker of self-righteous evangelism. The natives are represented as marine beasts, swarming in numbers like the sharks around the marooned *Grampus* earlier in the narrative:

In less time than I have taken to tell it, the ‘Jane’ saw herself surrounded by an immense multitude of desperadoes evidently bent upon capturing her at all hazards.

[...] Nothing could withstand their brute rage. Our men were borne down at once, overwhelmed, trodden under foot, and absolutely torn to pieces in an instant.

Seeing this, the savages on the rafts got the better of their fears, and came up in shoals to the plunder. In five minutes the ‘Jane’ was a pitiable scene indeed of havoc and tumultuous outrage. The decks were split open and ripped up; the cordage, sails, and everything movable on deck demolished as if by magic; while, by dint of pushing at the stern, towing with the canoes, and hauling at the sides, as they swam in thousands around the vessel, the wretches finally forced her on shore (the cable having been slipped) and delivered her over to the good offices of Too-wit, who, during the whole of the engagement, had maintained like a skilful general his post of security and reconnoissance among the hills, but, now that the victory was completed to his satisfaction, condescended to scamper down with his warriors of the black skin and become a partaker in the spoils.

(*AGP*, p.153, p.154)

Eager to represent the natives as animalistic and beyond the reach of ‘civilized’ man, Pym’s horrified voice of reason inadvertently suggests analogies with the behaviour of ‘civilized’ white men. The deliberate reference to sharks also connects with the cannibalization of Parker—‘having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet and head, throwing them, together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal’ (*AGP*, p.94).

Removing 'everything movable', the Tsalalians mirror the actions of the crew of the *Jane Guy*, although, importantly, the islanders do not exploit the ship's material wealth by productive, rationalized labour, but 'as if by magic'. Pym's representation of the practice is what is important here; his language reproduces the ideological construct of economic rationalism. So while Pym himself condemns the 'warriors of the black skin', the text's multiple inter-relations ironize his perspective; offering a critique of 'civilized' society, and of its presumptuous rhetoric of superiority. As the moral gap between mutineers and profiteering ship-owners was shown to be imaginary, so that between savages and civilized men is shown to be an ideological trope, as opposed to a material fact.

And it is in the linguistic and textual resonances that this novel has its force; I wish to look more closely at some of these manifestations of literariness. It is through language, and language alone, that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is constituted, and so particular attention must be paid to the multiplicity of its textuality. The novel's determinants within the specific cultural and social parameters of nineteenth-century American expansionism, determinants which impinge at all times upon the construction of identities within the text, need to be seen in the multiplicity of the writing. It is important to understand that while Poe's novel, as I have demonstrated, maps out and reproduces particular ideological structures of antebellum north America, it is not a facsimile of that particular historical epoch—no more than, say, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (or the film of the same name) is a direct representation of life in contemporary Edinburgh. Both are literary products of a particular milieu, but are not directly analogous with any other social product of that milieu—'the book is not the embodiment of an external reality which is veiled as it is displayed. Its reality is exclusively in the conflict which impels it and gives it its ordinances'.⁶⁰

The 'Preface' to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* provides clues to the emphasis which Poe's text places upon the instability of language as a constructing tool—an instability which, I feel, Poe welcomes. That language, and hence text, is a process

rather than a finished object is a central assumption in Poe's art. As is evident from his *Essays and Reviews*, for Poe language is contested because of its ultimate grounding in ideology and custom. If language re-presents the world to itself, in various forms, then it has the capacity both to mislead and to inform—the 'truth' is always constructed, always chosen. In Poe's fictional works, knowledge and truth are doubtful concepts, precisely because it is through the dynamic process of language that these abstract concepts are traditionally understood.

In the 'Preface' to his narrative, Arthur Gordon Pym tells of his worry that his story will not be believed; that it will not be believed because he can not remember in sufficient detail his experiences in the South Seas. The dualist distinction between reality and appearance is problematized in Pym's 'Preface': 'One consideration which deterred me was that, having kept no journal during a greater portion of the time in which I was absent, I feared I should not be able to write, from mere memory, a statement so minute and connected as to have the appearance of that truth it would really possess' (*AGP*, p.2). The text is to 'appear' true, even though it is 'really' true—so appearance *is* reality.

In 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' Poe writes: 'Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the most important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The truth lies not in the valleys where we seek her, but upon the mountain-tops where she is found'.⁶¹ Taken as an expression of the 'ratiocination' of Dupin, his insistence upon what is evidently so, this line is both succinct and practicable. However, when read in the context of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, with its 'saviour' boats bearing plague, the 'apparent kindness of disposition' of the ultimately 'barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches', and the final inexplicable shrouded white figure, the sentence becomes more opaque in possible meaning—and this is because in the novel Poe examines the representation and reading of signs much more thoroughly than in his short detective stories. We might say that if Dupin is a model of how to interpret the world's signs, then Pym is a model of how not to. Pym's narrative is expressive of the potentialities of language

and communication in general, and for this reason, the ironic multiplicity of the novel increases, rather than diminishes, its connected materiality.

When he states that 'I could only hope for belief among my family, and those of my friends who have had reason, through life to put faith in my veracity', the reader soon wonders who the people might be who would believe this consummate liar and self-confessed hypocrite. It is 'Mr. Poe' who advises Pym to 'trust to the shrewdness and common sense of the public' and to allow him, Poe, to 'to draw up, in his own words, a narrative of the earlier portion of my adventures, from facts afforded by myself, publishing it in the "Southern Messenger" *under the garb of fiction*' (AGP, p.3). However, neither Pym nor Poe have reckoned on the public's gullibility:

I found that, in spite of the air of fable which had been so ingeniously thrown around that portion of my statement which appeared in the 'Messenger' (without altering or distorting a single fact), the public were still not disposed to receive it as a fable, and several letters were sent to Mr. P—'s address, distinctly expressing a conviction to the contrary.
(AGP, p.3)

The irony is very heavy here, when we remember Poe's famously contemptuous opinion of the general public's intelligence and wit.⁶² In order to have his 'true' story believed, Pym has it published by Poe as fiction, and the public consequently believe it to be true—the implication is clear, that 'the public' are never willing to believe in the evident appearance of a thing. But when we look more closely at the text of Pym's narrative, the gap between appearance and reality is reintroduced as a gap constituted in perception.

Reading Augustus's scrawled letter in his hideaway, Arthur relies upon a brief reading to reach an understanding; and by its very brevity, that reading becomes analogous to the contingency of language. The text is always in the process of being produced, its determinants and potentialities residing in the writer's milieu and in the reader's interpretative strategies:

Again I turned the note, and went to work as I had previously done. Having rubbed in the phosphorous, a brilliancy ensued as before; but this time several lines of MS. in a large hand, and apparently in red ink, became distinctly visible. The glimmer, although sufficiently bright, was but momentary. Still, had I not been too greatly excited, there would have been ample time enough for me to peruse the whole three sentences before me—for I saw there were three. In my anxiety, however, to read all at once, I succeeded only in reading the seven concluding words, which thus appeared—*'blood—your life depends upon lying close.'*

(AGP, p.30)

Pym's obsession to 'discover' the polar 'secrets' stands as a narrative symbol of the desire to know, the wish to read the world—as Ahab and Ishmael variously attempt to 'read' the whale. But it is exactly Pym's inability to transcend the interpretative tropes of Romantic subjectivity and imperialist objectivism that render his reading of the world as partial as his reading of Augustus's note. It is indicative of Pym's blindness to his own ideological readings that he is unable to imagine a rationale behind the islanders' reactions to imperialism's tools:

They roamed about in silence, broken only by low ejaculations. The arms afforded them much food for speculation, and they were suffered to handle and examine them at leisure. I do not believe that they had the least suspicion of their actual use, but rather took them for idols, seeing the care we had of them, and the attention with which we watched their movements while handling them.

(AGP, p.133)

Pym's insouciance here is Poe's irony. Of course, weaponry is a kind of deity in the imperialist armoury, as the ultimate arbiter of disputes with recalcitrant natives; and so Pym inadvertently relates the truth behind the appearance. The instability of signs, unstable in that their meaning is always ideologically determined and contingent upon circumstance, informs the entire part of the narrative set on Tsalal.

The traders' willingness to believe in their own efficacy and superiority effectively blinds them to alternative readings of their 'hosts' behaviour; when they first meet the islanders, the captain of the *Jane Guy* produces a 'white handkerchief on the blade of an oar' as proof of their 'peaceful' intentions, assuming that this specific

symbol of pacificity will be recognized by 'the strangers'. The bilateral discussion to enable the *Jane Guy* to exploit the resources, including human ones, of the island is rendered as a one-way conversation by Pym—so that:

When the monarch had made an end of his meal, we commenced a series of cross-questionings in every ingenious manner we could devise, with a view of discovering what were the chief productions of the country, and whether any of them might be turned to profit. At length he seemed to have some idea of our meaning, and offered to accompany us to a part of the coast where he assured us the *beche de mer* (pointing to a specimen of that animal) was to be found in great abundance.

(*AGP*, p.140)

That 'the chief was as good as his word' cannot actually be determined, certainly not by Pym himself, as there is no 'word' of the chief's that Pym understands. Taking the indeterminate inflections of discourse as stable objects, Pym necessarily incorporates the chief's language into his own world-view—the islanders agree to be exploited because, for Pym and the ideology he mediates, that is their role in America's 'destiny'. It is a role filled on America's own soil by the 'Indians':

Although the huge territories [...] were inhabited by many native tribes, one can fairly say that at the time of discovery they were no more than a wilderness. The Indians occupied but did not possess the land. It is by agriculture that man wins the soil. and the first inhabitants of North America lived by hunting. Their unconquerable prejudices, their indomitable passions, their vices, and perhaps still more their savage virtues delivered them to inevitable destruction. The ruin of these people began as soon as the Europeans landed on their shores; it has continued ever since and is coming to completion in our own day. Providence, when it placed them amid the riches of the New World, seems to have granted them a short lease only; they were, in some sense, *only waiting*. Those coasts so well suited for trade and industry, those deep rivers, that inexhaustible valley of the Mississippi—in short, the whole continent—seemed the yet empty cradle of a great nation.

It was there that civilized man was destined to build society on new foundations, and for the first time applying theories till then unknown or deemed unworkable, to present the world with a spectacle for which past history had not prepared it.⁶³

Pym's islanders are also, from Pym's perspective, 'in some sense only waiting' on the arrival of the white trader, because 'the Americans can enforce respect for their flag; soon they will be able to make it feared.[...]They are born to rule the seas, to conquer the world'.⁶⁴

In the caves, discovering markings on the walls and 'huge tumuli, apparently the wreck of some gigantic structures of art' (*AGP*, p.166), Pym and Peters disagree over the meaning, if any, of the figures. The 'editor's' detailed reading of the cave hieroglyphs in the afternote to the novel exemplifies the urge to interpret the material world, to fill it ideologically. The observation that 'Mr. Pym has given the figures of the chasms without comment, and speaks decidedly of these chasms as having but a fanciful resemblance to alphabetical characters, and, in short, as being positively *not such*', is followed by a learned treatise on word roots, the relevance of which has 'beyond doubt, escaped the attention of Mr. Poe' (*AGP*, p.177). It has frequently been upon the relevance or otherwise of 'the editor's' reading of the hieroglyphs that critics have relied for their readings of this novel, and John Irwin in particular places it at the centre of his ambitious thesis on *American Hieroglyphics*, seeing in Poe's text a paradigmatic inquiry into the 'simultaneous origin of man and language'.⁶⁵ However, to read the flourish of etymological knowledge in the afternote to *Pym* as an unproblematic key which can unlock the 'meaning' is merely to lock the narrative into an ill-fitting interpretive straitjacket; Irwin avoids this.

Poe's text stresses the gap between the signification of language and the world of objective events. Pym is such a questionable narrator, and his adventures are so repeatedly 'mysterious' and 'unfathomable', that the notion of language as a direct and always-interpretable system is profoundly in question. The narrative resists closure by proffering contested conclusions: Peters's, Pym's and 'Mr. Poe's'. The insistence upon 'mystery' in the final part of the journey to the South Pole is generated by the ambivalent nature of the 'meanings' carried by the material world. The figures in the rock, Peters' face which 'wore at times an expression I could not fathom', Pym's own experiencing of 'a *numbness* of body and mind—a dreaminess

of sensation—but this was all’, defy the interpretative process (*AGP*, p.173). Central to Poe’s methodology is the use of irony as a tool to undermine not only the validity of his narrator, ‘Arthur Gordon Pym’, but also as a more generally discursive and disruptive force in the novel’s resistance to the reader’s ‘impulse toward coherent design and completed meaning.’⁶⁶

Even the ‘materially increased’ darkness in the narrative’s final paragraph resists a univocal reading. This story, and I believe critique, of white imperialism, written by an author known to have supported the American slave-trade, is complex in its dialectic of race and of ideology in general. If the natives of Tsalal fear and hate whiteness, then it is surmisable that they do so because of the exploitative practice which whiteness symbolizes for them:

This novel’s buried theme is the terror and vilification of whiteness. Poe invents a certain tribe living near the Antarctic Circle, close to that inexhaustible white continent, who for generation upon generation have apparently been exposed to the terrible depredations of men and of white storms. White is anathema to these natives, and I must confess that by the last lines of the last chapter it is also anathema to the reader worthy of the book.⁶⁷

Jorge Luis Borges’ assessment is apposite in that it reveals the ideology beneath racist semantics; if ‘whiteness’ represents terror for the islanders, then it is not due to any intrinsic property of whiteness as such, but to the material world in which it attains the level of symbol, a world of the ravages of nature and of Western man. To question Borges’ interpretation of the islanders’ ‘terror’ of whiteness on the grounds that ‘it was quite evident that they had never before seen any of the white race’ is to elide the contestability of Arthur Pym’s narrating.⁶⁸ It is Pym himself who tells us that the islanders had never seen a white man, and Pym, we know, is not to be trusted. Pym’s relentless objectification of the islanders is at one with the ‘inherent blindness on Pym’s part to the traces of previous human presence’.⁶⁹

Poe’s text is a clear exposition of the notion that ‘the bias of things is the bias of language’.⁷⁰ In page after page, *Pym* reveals the constructedness of identity and of

language, one of identity's prime determinants. That Poe sets out to *deconstruct* these formulations is perhaps what leads Henry James to regret the ending of *Pym* as 'imaginative effort wasted'. For James, Poe's narrative lacks psychological depth and 'the indispensable history of somebody's normal relation to something':

Moving accidents and mighty mutations and strange encounters [...] keep all their character [...] by looming through some other history—the indispensable history of somebody's normal relation to something. It's in such connexions as these that they most interest, for what we are then mainly concerned with is their imputed and borrowed dignity. Intrinsic values they have none—as we feel for instance in such a matter as the would-be portentous climax of Edgar Poe's "Arthur Gordon Pym," where the indispensable history is absent, where the phenomena evoked, the moving accidents, coming straight, as I say, are immediate and flat, and the attempt is all at the horrific in itself. The result is that, to my sense, the climax fails—fails because it stops short for want of connexions. There are no connexions; not only, I mean, in the sense of further statement, but of our own further relation to the elements, which hang in the void: whereby we see the effect lost, the imaginative effort wasted.⁷¹

But it is precisely in this 'want of connexions' that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* articulates the resistance of language, especially literary and figurative language, to simple mimetic readings. By incorporating in this one text the variable languages and structures of Romantic subjectivity, explorer's journal, and editorial 'distance', Poe makes problematic the notion of language as representation. It is surprising, if not astonishing, just how deeply Poe detested Thomas Carlyle's writings; surprising because in *Sartor Resartus* for instance, Carlyle produced a work which similarly questioned the authority of the reader and the author; in that text, the Scottish writer mocks the interpretative process, stressing, like Poe, the variable relationship between language and the 'real world' it would seek to represent.⁷²

The lexical gamesmanship at the close of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, even if it 'is as accurate and authentic as the scholarship of Poe's day was capable of producing', must be read in its textual context. Even if the 'editor's' final reading of the hieroglyphics is a 'true' one, this must not be taken as constituting the 'meaning' of the narrative; the contested and ideological nature of signification is so central to

the motivation of this text that to reduce it to the interpretation of some hieroglyphics is to remove its literary force. As in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave', the authority of language is transferable. Arthur Pym brings with him the linguistic forms of capitalist expansionism and is seduced by the rhetoric of his own narrative into believing his journey destined and glorious.

The ideological import of language, the connections between hegemonic forms of social organization and the manipulation of linguistic signifiers, is central to my assertion that identity is radically questioned in Poe's fiction (and in Dana's book and Douglass's story). The 'provincialism' of which Henry James 'accused' Poe is more of an ironic detachment from the centripetal, and, paradoxically, centrifugal (in that it is expansive) ideology of Manifest Destiny. We shake our heads as we read Poe's essays praising America's increasing naval prowess, we feel revulsion at his defence of slavery, and we decry the morbidity of his poetry; yet when we encounter *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* we feel an undercurrent of radical contradictoriness, a questioning of the implicit values of America (both north and south), values which were to gain, and retain, hegemonic sway over the Pacific and the rest of the world in the century and a half which followed the publication of Poe's book.

Having opposed the 'core' culture of Britain through his literary criticism, Poe seeks to go beyond 'partizan[ry] in letters' in his fiction. And it is both sad and ironic that Donald Pease, in an otherwise excellent paper, seeks to reclaim Poe for his home-nation; thus merely replicating the old canonical distinctions which, in seeking to establish a national literary 'tradition', lay claim to exclusivity.⁷³ Such is Pease's partizanship that it is not Poe as such who is being claimed as part of America's rightful heritage, but *criticism and interpretation* of his writings. Attacking what he terms 'the appropriation of American culture by the French', with de Tocqueville as his exemplar, Pease goes on to deride Derridean deconstruction as a 'somewhat dubious French practice'. Pease's pejorative use of the word 'French' has no apparent benefit for his argument, and actually undermines that which is good in what he says. The fact that the 'French practice' of deconstruction is commonly accepted as

deriving its primary epistemological impetus from the writings of Nietzsche is simply ignored, probably because it would upset Pease's 'theory', which seems to be an American form of the 'cultural chauvinism' which Raman Selden has identified as 'particularly' English.⁷⁴ Perhaps it is mid-Atlantic.

Poe's *Essays and Reviews* could not make it clearer that in language resides power. The weaker points of the problematical 'core-periphery' paradigm are tested in the Anglo-British relationships mediated by Poe's writings. If, as Poe seems to argue, America moved from subserviency to British periodical and literary dictates to being 'the maddest *partizans* in letters', then that move was an example of, and a replication of, America's increased power in the world. By expanding, we might say, America became central; yet it is the resistances to this hegemony that inform *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and that Frederick Douglass so outstandingly exemplifies. And in Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* there is a passage perfectly illustrative of the fluctuating actuality of domination and submission, and of the linguistic register of this flux. Dana writes that at Santa Barbara:

There was only one vessel in the port—a long, sharp brig of about 300 tons with raking masts and very square yards, and English colors at her peak. We afterwards learned that she was built at Guayaquil, and named the 'Ayacucho,' after the place where the battle was fought that gave Peru her independence, and was now owned by a Scotchman named Wilson, who commanded her, and was engaged in the trade between Callao, the Sandwich Islands, and California.

(TYB, p.100)

The irony is heavy, if unintentional. A boat named in memory of Peruvian independence is owned and 'commanded' by 'a Scotchman named Wilson'. Robert Louis Stevenson was to write of Europeans in the South Seas, and in the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will consider Stevenson's discursive examination of identity and authority both in his native Scotland, in 'The Merry Men'; and, also in some of his 'South Seas' writings. Stevenson's best writing seems to realise the full ideological and linguistic import of the constructedness of identity. Ultimately, I believe, Stevenson registered the unease of Western, and specifically British,

expansionism at the end of the nineteenth century; the century of imperialism and capitalism.

Notes to Chapter 4

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3. William Brock, *Scotus Americanus*, pp.93-94.
4. Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 2 volumes (Edinburgh, 1834), I, p.230.
5. William Carlos Williams, *In The American Grain* (1925; rpt. Great Britain, 1966), p.217, p.223.
6. William Carlos Williams, *In The American Grain*, p.226.
7. William Carlos Williams, *In The American Grain*, p.227.
8. William Carlos Williams, *In The American Grain*, p.226.
9. William Carlos Williams, *In The American Grain*, p.226.
10. Walt Whitman, *An American Primer*, edited by Horace Traubel (London, 1904), pp.29-30, pp.32-33.
11. Walt Whitman, *An American Primer*, p.8.
12. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden: volume 1 (March 28-July 14, 1888)* (Boston, 1906), p.96.
13. Walt Whitman, *An American Primer*, p.7.
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17. Walt Whitman, *An American Primer*, p.35.

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22. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, edited by J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford, 1994), p.10. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed AGP.
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25. Dennis Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Columbia, Missouri, 1989), p.42.
26. Daniel Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (London, 1973), p.201.
27. Russell J. Reising, *The Unusable Past: Theory and the Study of American Literature*, New Accents (New York, 1986), p.237.
28. Harold Beaver, 'Introduction' to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, by Edgar Allan Poe (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.15.
29. Harold Beaver, 'Introduction' to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p.17, p.18.
30. Frederick Douglass, 'The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro', in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, edited by Philip S. Foner, 5 vols (New York, 1975), II, pp.181-204 (p.192).
31. H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, expanded edition (Oxford, 1989), p.8.
32. John Carlos Rowe, 'Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism', in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, edited by Richard Kopley (Durham, Virginia, 1992), pp.117-138 (p.131).

33. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (1970; rpt. London, 1992), p.170.
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35. Scott Bradfield, *Dreaming Revolution*, p.73..
36. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, edited by Thomas Philbrick (Harmondsworth, 1981), p.43. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and are prefixed *TYB*.
37. H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America*, p.32.
38. 'The Heroic Slave', in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1975), v, pp.475-505, (p.503).
39. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, v, p.502.
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43. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, v, p.503.
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45. D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Phoenix edition (1964; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1977), p.131.
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48. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden: volume 4*, p. 462.
49. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, thirteenth edition, edited by J.P. Mayer, translated by George Lawrence (1966; rpt. London, 1994), pp.402-403.
50. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by John Ward Ostrom, 2 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948), I, pp.256-257.
51. For example: Robert L. Carringer, 'Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*', *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 506-516; and, Robert H. Byer, 'Mysteries of the City: A Reading of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"', in *Ideology*

and *Classic American Literature*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (1986; rpt. Cambridge, 1994) pp.221-246, where Byer alludes to 'Poe's well-known strictures against "the mob"' (p.234).

52. John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven, New York, 1980), pp.151-152.

53. John Carlos Rowe, 'Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism', p.122.

54. Daniel Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*, p.201.

55. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (1976; rpt. London, 1986), p.124.

56. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp.324-325.

57. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.339.

58. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.280.

59. Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1965), p.154, p.155.

60. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p.36.

61. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, Everyman edition (1908; rpt. London, 1975), p.392.

62. One example among many should suffice. In August, 1845, Poe wrote in *Godey's Lady's Book*: 'the Swedenborgians inform me that they have discovered all that I said in a magazine article entitled "Mesmeric Revelation," to be absolutely true, although at first they were very strongly inclined to doubt my veracity—a thing which, in that particular instance, I never dreamed of not doubting myself. The story is a pure fiction from beginning to end', (Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, p.1367).

63. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.30.

64. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.407.

65. John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics*, p.64.

66. John Carlos Rowe, 'Writing and Truth in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*', *Glyph*, 2 (1977), 102-121 (p.104).

67. Jorge Luis Borges, 'Narrative Art and Magic', in *Borges: A Reader*, edited by Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York, 1981), pp.34-38 (p.36).
68. Jean Ricardou, "'The Singular Character of the Water'", translated by Frank Towne, *Poe Studies*, 9, no.1 (June 1976), 1-6 (p.3).
69. John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics*, p.167.
70. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p.59.
71. *The Novels of Henry James*, 26 vols (New York, 1909), XVII, *The Altar of the Dead, The Beast in the Jungle, The Birthplace, and Other Tales*, pp. xix-xx.
72. As examples of Poe's biting attacks on Carlyle, I offer two of the sharpest:

 'Words—printed ones especially—are murderous things. Keats did (or did not) die of a criticism.[...] As for myself, I am fast dying of the "*Sartor Resartus*".' (*Essays and Reviews*, p.1370);

 'Either a man intends to be understood, or he does not. If he write a book which he intends not to be understood, we shall be very happy indeed not to understand it; but if he write a book which he means to be understood, and, in this book, be at all possible pains to prevent us from understanding it, we can only say that he is an ass—and this, to be brief, is our private opinion of Mr. Carlyle, which we now take the liberty of making public.' (*Essays and Reviews*, pp.460-61).
73. Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p.159. (It would of course be ridiculous to claim, for instance, that Conrad has been 'appropriated'—from whom? England, Britain, Poland?—by Frederick Jameson, or Shakespeare by Stephen Greenblatt, but that is what Pease's attitude implies).
74. Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, second edition (Hemel Hempstead, 1989), p.1.

Chapter 5

Stevenson and the Imperial Margins

Wilson, the Scottish owner and 'commander' of the brig named "'Ayacucho," after the place where the battle was fought that gave Peru her independence', mentioned in Dana's *Two-Years Before the Mast*, connects the particular practices of nineteenth-century American expansionism, both inland and overseas, to the more established project of British imperialism. British imperialism being in itself only a part of Europe's conquering ideologies. Ideologies which read European culture as central and others as peripheral; or, civilized and barbaric, if we like.

John Berger recognizes the essentially ideological nature of the centre-periphery paradigm when he writes about the idea of centrality as a 'belief'. In a radical mode, echoing Walter Benjamin's call for history to be written 'against the grain', Berger argues that it is at the so-called peripheries that the ideology of historicism is revealed:

The remoteness of the corners is only partly explained by latitude or climate. It's at least as much to do with time. Centres generate the future—or at least this is what our continent believed for a couple of centuries. The periphery was where the past ended up. Victors captured the centre. The vanquished retreated to the edge.¹

Identifying history as a repository of centrality and peripherality, Berger here exposes the purely ideological nature of the paradigm—that it is in fact a battle over subjectivity as much as anything else. The centre, believing it possesses adequate weapons for finding the 'truth'—the printed word, economic orthodoxy, military might—proceeds to 'read' the periphery relative to these ideologies; inevitably, the periphery is seen as 'lacking' these things. In common contemporary usage, the periphery is 'developing' or 'underdeveloped' whereas the centre is 'developed'.

In Robert Louis Stevenson's fictional and non-fictional prose, the periphery is inscribed as not strangely 'other' but as dialectically connected to the centre. The centre is not used as a fixed, nodal point from which 'the corner-pockets' of the world (in Scotland, America or the South Pacific) can be empirically measured and judged. In Stevenson's writing it is the relationship, the interconnectedness of different cultural and economic practices which is foregrounded. And it is not so much as direct opposition to European and/or American imperialism that fiction such as *The Ebb-Tide*, 'The Beach of Falesá', and, most interestingly perhaps, 'The Merry Men', becomes currency, but as textual figurings of the matrices of economic and cultural exploitation and difference. In this chapter I hope to illustrate the ways in which Stevenson's writing predicts some post-colonialist critical stances, and particularly the ways in which it might be evaluated alongside those post-colonialist critiques which refuse binaryism for a more complex, and perhaps more fully realized, reading of colonialist texts.

Firstly, though, it should not be forgotten that Stevenson *is* a colonialist writer in more than one sense. He is colonialist in a pejorative sense; much of his writing reflects the imperialist mentality in its various guises of paternalism and condescension. Like Althusser's, or Lukács's, Balzac, Stevenson 'make[s] us "perceive" (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which [he is] held'.² But he is also a colonialist writer in that his works deal quite explicitly with the interaction between colonizer and colonized, and with the struggle for agency in the colonized regions of the world. Stevenson approaches the problem of identity not as a personal, asocial construct, but as a reflection of the existing social structures and of the fluctuating relationships within those structures.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, for example, might be more usefully read as a textual manifestation of the dialectical relationship between bourgeois

morality of late nineteenth century Britain and the cult of the individual than as a story of an abstracted “good” and “evil”. Or, alternatively, and very relevantly for this thesis, it can be read as a textual rendering of the ideological foundations of British imperialism, because ‘like the crowd’s bonding together against Hyde (or in any other group dynamic), the imperialist project served to unite a “civilized” Great Britain (in spite of its many internal differences) in order to privilege that Britain over the “uncivilized” peoples it sought to colonize and civilize’.³ And it is in his ability to locate such tensions even, and perhaps especially, at the outer reaches of his own ‘avowedly cold, sterile, and unpopulous’ Scotland, which is ‘but a little part’ of a Britain which is ‘altogether small, the mere taproot of her extended empire’,⁴ that Stevenson’s specific relevance to the postcolonialist project should be measured. The South Seas stories, the letters of protest at the treatment of a Samoan chief, and the attacks upon the delinquent Europeans of the South Pacific, relate to the problematic of empire and economy in connected albeit different ways as ‘The Merry Men’, ‘The Pavilion on the Links’, *The Master of Ballantrae* and ‘Thrawn Janet’, to name just a few works.

In ‘The Merry Men’, the question of identity propels the narrative as in *The Master of Ballantrae*; in that novel, the active dialectic between the narrating voice of Mackellar and the actions which he narrates have become the focus of much recent critical commentary, among the most incisive being Cairns Craig’s reading of the novel in his essay ‘Out of History’. Here, Craig points to the relationship between the ideological impulses which govern Mackellar’s account, the ‘quiet, unremarkable power of progress which now dominates the new Scotland of the Hanoverian world order’.⁵ Quite rightly, Craig stresses that it is Mackellar’s suppression of facts, the slant he gives to the narration, which is, ironically, most revelatory:

What Mackellar’s narrative gradually reveals is that the control which he has as a *narrator*, retrospectively organising the events he is telling, is a perfect image of the control he *actually* sought to achieve over the affairs of the House of Durrisdeer as the events were taking place, a control which he tries to conceal in his retrospective narration of them. The textual power he wields in writing the narrative of the events to which he

was “witness” is a formal analogy of the actual power by which he sought to shape the relation between the brothers at the very moment when the events were occurring.⁶

And it is Mackellar’s ultimate failure to prevent the ‘truth’ of the story getting out, because he is ‘haunted by those he has consigned to a grave in a barbarous wilderness’ which is its ultimate irony⁷—his attempts to control the narrative reveal that he *is* trying to control it, and thus reintroduces the excluded ideology of James, the Jacobite ‘Master’, to the novel.

What I want to argue in the first part of this chapter is that ‘The Merry Men’ similarly exposes the will-to-power of its ‘Enlightenment’ narrator, and that in so doing it problematizes the core-periphery paradigm which so often dominates the ways in which Scottish literature is currently discussed, and which is a principal theoretical tool of many postcolonialist readings of both ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ writings.

In ‘The Scot Abroad’ chapter of his autobiographical account of life in America, *The Silverado Squatters*, Stevenson explains the problem of Scotland—that it is both a nation and not a nation at the same time. National identity, as expressed in Stevenson’s writing, is a comforting fiction, told to give the appearance of unity and coherence where in fact there is none: ‘Scotland is indefinable; it has no unity except upon the map. Two languages, many dialects, innumerable forms of piety, and countless local patriotisms and prejudices, part us among ourselves more widely than the extreme east and west of that great continent of America.’⁸ So that while ‘A Scotsman may tramp the better part of Europe and the United States, and never again receive so vivid an impression of foreign travel and strange lands and manners as on his first excursion into England’,⁹ there is a question-mark over the idea and fact of the title ‘Scotsman’.

In ‘The Merry Men’, Stevenson inscribes a specific textual rendering of what might be called the ‘indefinable’ nation of Scotland in this context. In that story, Scotland

is placed both within and outside the European Enlightenment project, within and outside imperialist expansionism, and stands not as a 'national' signifier of the exploited or the exploiter (like 'Samoa' and 'Germany' were to do, for example) but as a symbolic projection of the shifting, and ultimately relative, nature of national identity and cultural troping. Above all, though, 'The Merry Men' evokes the complex matrices of domination and nervous insularity underlying the Enlightenment project, and the commensurate state of Great Britain; Stevenson locates, at a geographical extremity of the British Isles, its central paradoxes.

Stevenson's adolescent essay, 'The Pentland Rising: A Page of History', exemplifies a reading of history 'against the grain', prefiguring Stevenson's famous resistance to Western political chicanery in Samoa:

Though it is the fashion of the day to jeer and to mock, to execrate and to condemn the noble band of Covenanters, though the bitter laugh at their old-world religious views, the curl of the lip at their merits, and the chilling silence on their bravery and their determination, are but too rife through all society; be charitable to what was evil, and honest to what was good about the Pentland insurgents, who fought for life and liberty, for country and religion, on the 28th of November, 1666, now just two hundred years ago.¹⁰

This reading of history, stridently taking the side of the losers, was to become Stevenson's outstanding literary and ideological marker in the last years of his life in the South Pacific. It shares in some of Walter Benjamin's concern that history be seen as what *has not* been told; what George Steiner, in a recent newspaper column, identifies as Benjamin's 'definition of history as the as yet unrecaptured sum of the sufferings of the vanquished, of the speechless, and the implacable view of human culture as built on human ruin.'¹¹ Particularly in the light of Stevenson's involvement in Samoan politics, and his writings at *that* margin of the world-historical text, 'The Pentland Rising' deserves more interest, and a more sympathetic reading, than that given to it by one recent biographer of Stevenson, who simply condemns it as 'desperately dull, derivative, suitably pious and stuffed with quotations from Defoe and others'.¹²

'The Pentland Rising' is, I believe, a precursor to such writings as Stevenson's letter to J.F. Hogan, M.P., printed in the *Daily Chronicle*, March 18, 1895. The subject of the letter is the exiling to 'a coral reef' of a Samoan chief by a conspiracy of the imperialist powers of Britain, Germany and the United States:

I am a man with a grievance, and my grievance has the misfortune to be very small and very far away. It is very small, for it is only the case of under a score of brown-skinned men who have been dealt with in the dark by I know not whom. And I want to know. I want to know by whose authority Mataafa was given over into German hands, I want to know by whose authority, and for how long a term of years, he is condemned to the miserable exile of a low island.¹³

In 'The Merry Men', the dialectic between Enlightenment causality and the 'old-world religious views' of the Covenanters is interrogated, and it is in the repressions and elisions of the narrating voice that the struggle for coherency is manifested. Gordon Darnaway, the uncle of the narrator, is situated at the extremity of the world of the narrative by his religion and his geographical location. His peripherality, if we like, is complete: he represents the redundant past, or seems to at the beginning of the story. Yet in the detail of the battle between Enlightenment nephew and Covenanting uncle are written the contradictions and anxieties of the supposedly victorious ideologies of 'Moderate' Enlightenment rationalism and capitalism.

The narrative opens with some seemingly straightforward references to different identities; Charles Darnaway, the narrator, stating that 'I was far from being a native of these parts, springing, as I did, from an unmixed Lowland stock.'¹⁴ However, in his diction and choice of words, Darnaway reveals numerous potential identities, adopting a 'lowland' or an 'island' persona as the situation demands; and this dynamic suggests an underlying anxiety behind the cool facade of Enlightenment progressivism. Darnaway's desire to feel at home on the island of Aros, and his sense of his difference and alienation there, inscribe the dialectical opposition of Enlightenment hegemony and 'childish superstitions' (*MM*, p.17) in every line of the text.

The story which the Enlightenment—and with specific relevance to ‘The Merry Men’ we can talk of the Scottish Enlightenment—told itself, and the world, was that in the inevitable progress of humankind, those peoples and parts of the globe which retained vestiges of ‘barbarism’ and did not conform to the standardized dictates of rationalism in all aspects of culture, economics and ideals would inevitably—as by Providential design—become obsolete and peripheral: ‘The periphery was where the past ended up. Victors captured the centre. The vanquished retreated to the edge.’¹⁵ However, in the opening pages of ‘The Merry Men’, a different story is hinted at:

Our family was dying out in the Lowlands; there is little luck for any of that race; and perhaps my father was the luckiest of all, for not only was he one of the last to die, but he left a son to his name and a little money to support it. I was a student of Edinburgh University, living well enough at my own charges, but without kith or kin; when some news of me found its way to Uncle Gordon on the Ross of Grisapol; and he, as he was a man who held blood thicker than water, wrote to me the day he heard of my existence, and taught me to count Aros as my home. Thus it was that I came to spend my vacations in that part of the country, so far from all society and comfort, between the codfish and the moorcocks; and thus it was that now, when I had done with my classes, I was returning thither with so light a heart that July day.

(*MM*, pp.3-4)

We read here that it is ‘the Lowland stock’ which is dying out, and that ‘there is little luck for any of that race.’ If this passage is read within the parameters suggested by the rest of the story—Charles’s linguistic confusion, the race for property and the will-to-power—then a quite different reading of Scottish history is suggested by ‘The Merry Men’ from that proposed, for example, in Walter Scott’s *Waverley* and *Redgauntlet*, in which an all-conquering Hanoverian order ultimately flattens out—by incorporation—Jacobite ruptions.

In ‘The Merry Men’, it is precisely the supposed vanquishing power which is deconstructed dialectically through Charles Darnaway’s relationship with his uncle. Charles takes his Enlightenment education to Aros precisely because he fears erasure and his own marginalization. In every line, and by brilliant paradox through the

voice of a student of the 'then Principal in Edinburgh College, the famous writer, Dr. Robertson', this story undermines the authority of the empiricist anthropologism of the Enlightenment; the contradictions and blindness to its own constructedness as an ideology are made textually material. Charles's mentor, William Robertson, was 'made Principal of Edinburgh University in 1762, and [together with Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, formed] the three leading forces in the years of what is sometimes called the "High Enlightenment."'16

So, Charles is conducting research under the supervision of one of the 'leading forces' of the Scottish Enlightenment, and he brings with him to Aros a set of Enlightenment assumptions regarding the language and culture of civilization's peripheries. A prime assumption being that 'the development of society is structured in terms of temporality: societies are more or less advanced than one another, they belong to the past or to the future in terms of their relation to the fundamental stages of the development of society.'17 This links the Scotland of 'The Merry Men' with 'the era of Western European voyages of discovery and scientific exploration [and] the assumption that journeys to distant lands are journeys into the past, that the natives of these lands are men in an earlier state of cultural development than the Europeans who visit them.'18

Charles is, effectively, a one-man invading force, determined to bring the light of progress to 'that outlying, obscure islet of the western sea' (*MM*, p.34). 'The Merry Men' should not be read as a defence of Covenanting Christianity, or even of the way of life of the Scottish Isles; instead, it can be more productively read as a textual laying bare of the ideological force behind the supposedly 'common sense' teachings of the Scottish Enlightenment. Charles's search for an identity is enacted both through his direct speech and his narrative voice. In a continuous dislocation of identity, Charles alternately refers to himself as islander and outsider. 'Without kith or kin', his desire to belong to somewhere, anywhere, leads him to include himself in the pronominal 'we' of the islanders—'The Ross, as we call it, is a promontory neither wide nor high, but as rough as God made it to this day' (*MM*, p.4); and,

although only coming 'to spend my vacations in that part of the country', clearly seeing it more as a wild and picturesque holiday home, than a place to actually live, Charles claims it as 'the place I had learned to call my home' (*MM*, p.13); finally, his increasing conviction of his rightful proprietorship over Aros is made material in the proposed expulsion of 'the black' from the island:

'The black,' said I, 'is the cause of this attack. It may even be his presence in the house that keeps my uncle on the hill. We have done the fair thing; he has been fed and warmed under this roof; now I propose that Rorie put him across the bay in the coble, and take him through the Ross as far as Grisapol.'

(*MM*, p.58)

From his first steps into his uncle's house, Charles's desire to take ownership of house, island, and his cousin Mary is obvious. By interfering with the 'the plain old kitchen that I knew so well, with the high-backed settle, and the stools, and the closet-bed for Rorie', Gordon Darnaway has disturbed his nephew's vision of domestic order, in which 'The room, like the house, had been a sort of wonder in that country-side, it was so neat and habitable' (*MM*, pp.12-13).

Charles's discomfort at seeing the changes can be read as a register of his ideological need for stability and determinacy. He can no longer understand, or 'read' an Aros which no longer conforms to his expectations of a summer vacation cottage. Crucially, it is precisely the emphasis placed by the Enlightenment philosophy upon appearances which is being interrogated here by Stevenson's text. Because empiricism theorizes that 'all genuine knowledge depends upon experience',¹⁹ Charles is trapped within the confines of a system of thought which is generically blind to the conditions of its own formulation. And not only is the young acolyte Charles fooled by appearances, or by 'experience' if we like, into a misreading of the situation on Aros, the great William Robertson is an even bigger dupe:

It was towards the end of April that I had been given these papers to sort out by Dr. Robertson: and it came suddenly back upon my mind that they were thus prepared for a Spanish historian, or a man calling himself such, who had come with high recommendations to the Principal, on a mission

of inquiry as to the dispersion of the great Armada. Putting one thing with another, I fancied that the visitor 'with the gold rings upon his fingers' might be the same with Dr. Robertson's historian from Madrid. If that were so, he would be more likely after treasure for himself than information for a learned society.

(*MM*, pp.23-4)

'The Merry Men' articulates the unavoidable ambiguity of experience, of its conditioning by and through the contingencies of the material world; and to accept the *over*-determination of meaning which this implies is to understand that it is precisely in the interstices between things 'calling [them]selves such' and the actual complex of relationships which exist between such things, or people, that the particular dialectic of language is situated. In many of the texts discussed in this thesis, the writings of Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe, and in *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* and *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan*, we can discern an awareness of the ways in which literature is expressive of identifiable historical processes and facts, and yet at the same time, being constituted of 'calling' people and things by certain names, enters into differential, often non-referential relationships with the extra-literary world, because 'words are never transparent'.²⁰ This thesis is posited on the idea that literature is both a part of, and also has a dialogic relationship with, the non-literary world. Texts carry authority (and resistance); they embody ideological tropes (and ironic deconstruction of these tropes). It is with the resistances and deconstructions that the narrator of 'The Merry Men' struggles.

Reading 'The Merry Men', we encounter the problem of history as text, as linguistic discourse, even as we accept that "'history" is not reducible to textuality; [...]when historical forces are transposed into the discourse of "history", the forces remain as the "grain" with which or against which the discourse pulls.'²¹ Because Aros is on the periphery, at the margin, the need for Charles Darnaway is to incorporate it into the modern, mercantile world of Britain—'my own period in the world's history' (*MM*, p.31), as Charles so staidly puts it—and conquer its prehistoric savagery through his own Enlightenment discourse:

The truth is, that in a south-westerly wind, that part of our archipelago is no better than a trap. If a ship got through the reefs, and weathered the Merry Men, it would be to come ashore on the south coast of Aros, in Sandag Bay, where so many dismal things befell our family, as I propose to tell. The thought of all these dangers, in the place I knew so long, makes me particularly welcome the works now going forward to set lights upon the headlands and buoys along the channels of our iron-bound, inhospitable islands.

(*MM*, p.7)

Of course, Stevenson's familial involvement with the construction of lighthouses around the Scottish coast gives an added poignancy to this detail of the narrative and situates Charles's anxiety about marginalization within the broader literary and philosophical context of 'the peculiar intensity of Romanticism in Scotland, and [...] the great significance of the country as a locale of the European romantic fancy.'²²

Charles's place in between the dangerous world of Aros and the civilized safety of Edinburgh is rendered symbolically in his attempt to dive to the wreck. Standing naked, 'on the extreme margin with my hands clasped irresolute':

It was all that I could do to catch a trail of the sea-tangle that grew so thickly on the terrace; but once so far anchored I secured myself by grasping a whole armful of these thick and slimy stalks, and, planting my feet against the edge, I looked around me. On all sides the clear sand stretched forth unbroken; it came to the foot of the rocks, scoured into the likeness of an alley in a garden by the action of the tides; and before me, for as far as I could see, nothing was visible but the same many-folded sand upon the sun-bright bottom of the bay. Yet the terrace to which I was then holding was as thick with strong sea-growths as a tuft of heather, and the cliff from which it bulged hung draped below the water-line with brown lianas. In this complexity of forms, all swaying together in the current, things were hard to be distinguished; and I was still uncertain whether my feet were pressed upon the natural rock or upon the timbers of the Armada treasure-ship, when the whole tuft of tangle came away in my hand, and in an instant I was on the surface, and the shores of the bay and the bright water swam before my eyes in a glory of crimson.

(*MM*, p.30)

The linear narrative of history, a paradigmatic construct of Enlightenment ideology, is teased open in this passage, and the fact that it is only 'a whole armful of [...]

thick and slimy stalks' that 'secure' and 'anchor' Charles makes material his precarious 'marginal' position . If 'even the terrace below obscurely rocked and quivered' (*MM*, p.31), then on how solid a ground is his empiricist philosophy constructed? Charles's 'dreams of wealth' (*MM*, p.29) are confounded by the refusal of the past to open itself up for his inspection and claim. The physical world seems to withhold 'the proof' (*MM*, p.29) which he seeks, so 'nothing is visible'; and the unbridgeable distance between past and present is made unbridgeable by its very complexity, by the difficulty which adheres in the act of creating a structured historical narrative from unstructured, contingent happenings.

In 'The Merry Men', as in *Moby-Dick*, the natural world is represented as not only being outwith the demands of human ideology, but of seemingly opposing these demands through overdetermination and ambivalence. The contest for 'meaning' is played out dialectically between a representative individual—Charles, Darnaway, Captain Ahab, Arthur Gordon Pym— and the natural world, at the margins of 'the cluster of symbols called "civilization."'²³ Charles's emblematic search for wealth at the bottom of the sea meets full resistance from sea, land and sky:

A great change passed at that moment over the appearance of the bay. It was no more that clear, visible interior, like a house roofed with glass, where the green, submarine sunshine slept so stilly. A breeze, I suppose, had flawed the surface, and a sort of trouble and blackness filled its bosom, where flashes of light and clouds of shadow tossed confusedly together. Even the terrace below obscurely rocked and quivered. It seemed a graver thing to venture on this place of ambushes; and when I leaped into the sea the second time it was with a quaking in my soul.

(*MM*, p.31)

Imaging the sea as a human-built, domestic 'house roofed with glass', with a 'clear, visible interior', Charles reveals the restricted parameters of his own imagination; he is ideologically conditioned to seek order and control over those things which cannot be ordered and controlled. He is an ideologue of the Enlightenment; of the type whose 'demand for tolerance', in Georg Lukács' words, 'obviously does not exclude a fanatical championship of the humanist standpoint'.²⁴ For Charles, what is hidden

must be brought to the surface and claimed for civilization; yet it is not the hiding but the looking which is problematized, and 'a breeze' is sufficient to introduce obscurity, shadow and 'blackness' where Charles wants clarity and light. It is for this very reason that the Merry Men themselves, the rocks, obsess Charles; they both frighten and attract him, yet unlike his uncle he cannot give in to them, to their power.

It is, however, the physicality of the world, and the construction of signifying systems within this milieu, which inform the narrative structure of 'The Merry Men' at every level. There is an awareness, both in the narrator's world-view, and in the author's structuring of the text, of the inescapable materiality of both the world and human consciousness. From 'an iron shoe-buckle' 'crusted with the red rust' (*MM*, p.30), Charles extrapolates the actuality of a human existence; shorn of its primary utilitarian function of keeping a shoe on a foot, the buckle is transformed into a fetishistic object for the narrator, its primary function now being symbolic and metaphorical—or, more properly, synechdocal. A whole narrative of sailing, shipwreck and murder is invested in this buckle by Charles, who proves himself adept at constructing not only a narrative but also interpretation of that invented narrative:

The sight of this poor human relic thrilled me to the heart [...]. I held it in my hand, and the thought of its owner appeared before me like the presence of an actual man. His weather-beaten face, his sailor's hands, his sea-voice hoarse with singing at the capstan, the very foot that had once worn that buckle and trod so much along the swerving decks—the whole human fact of him, as a creature like myself, with hair and blood and seeing eyes, haunted me in that sunny, solitary place, not like a spectre, but like some friend whom I had basely injured. [...] Was this shoe buckle bought but the other day and worn by a man of my own period in the world's history, hearing the same news from day to day, thinking the same thoughts, praying, perhaps, in the same temple with myself?

[...]Mankind is a material creature, slow to think and dull to perceive connections. The grave, the wreck of the brig, and the rusty shoe-buckle were surely plain advertisements. A child might have read their dismal story, and yet it was not until I touched that actual piece of mankind that the full horror of the charnel ocean burst upon my spirit.

(*MM*, pp.31-32)

The 'connections' perceived by Charles are, however, only *possible* connections; and it is precisely in the making of connections that the art of narrative—including the narrative of History—lies. In *The Silverado Squatters*, Stevenson 'reads' the remnants of past mining production, observing 'Signs were not wanting of the ancient greatness of Silverado. The footpath was well marked, and had been well trodden in the old days by thirsty miners'; and, he emphasizes the presence, as it were, of the past in his home:

We were surrounded by so many evidences of the expense and toil, we lived so entirely in the wreck of that great enterprise like mites in the ruins of a cheese, that the idea of the old din and bustle haunted our repose. Our own house, the forge, the dump, the chutes, the rails, the windlass, the mass of broken plant; the two tunnels, one far below in the green dell, the other on the platform where we kept our wine; the deep shaft, with the sun-glints and the water-drops; above all, the ledge, that great gaping slice out of the mountain shoulder, propped apart by wooden wedges, on whose immediate margin, high above our heads, the one tall pine precariously nodded—these stood for its greatness; while the dog-hutch, bootjacks, old boots, old tavern bills, and the very beds that we inherited from bygone miners, put in human touches and realised for us the story of the past.²⁵

The physical world of the miners imposes itself upon Stevenson and his family, introducing 'the story of the past' to their lives. The randomness and smallness of the personal objects—'bootjacks, old boots, old tavern bills'—is what 'realise[s]' the story of the mine's 'greatness'. In this passage, it is the minutiae which are privileged in the narrative construction: the 'human touches' which give social meaning. Stevenson's famous maxim in his essay 'A Humble Remonstrance', that 'Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate'²⁶, is, perhaps paradoxically, a justification for the concentration upon specific material detail which I believe informs all his best fictional prose writing—as well as *The Silverado Squatters* and *The Amateur Emigrant*. The paradox is that it is in the seemingly trivial detail that the narrative connections, the possibilities, might be

best observed; and that it is these details which enable the writer to avoid 'monstrous' universal abstractions.

In 'The Merry Men', it is the tangible world which carries traces of the political and economic struggles of the age. The presence of European imperialism, the centrifugal pull of the British state and the philosophy of enlightened rationalism, are realized in both their linguistic and non-linguistic materiality. And, it is as a narrative of these hegemonies, and of forms of narrative which might contest their efficacy, that I believe 'The Merry Men' can now be most meaningfully interpreted. Charles's 'historical' ideology encounters and opposes, and is resisted by, the 'damnatory creed and [...] darkest superstitions' (*MM*, p.46) of his uncle, Gordon, and by the 'old wives' stories' of 'the country people'; it is on this dialogical struggle that Stevenson's text focuses. Charles's entire act of narration, with its barely concealed anxieties and obsessions, is expressive of the contested nature of language.

The dialogical contest between the written and the spoken word, between the English language as spoken by Charles and the Scots of his uncle, Gordon, is played out on many textual levels. What is at stake in this story is the very formation of individual and social identity, and in the speech of Gordon Darnaway we find an example of a subject in dialogue with itself. Charles's initial description of his uncle places the latter firmly in the past, as a living remnant of a defeated and dying culture:

He was a sour, small, bilious man, with a long face and very dark eyes; fifty-six years old, sound and active in body, and with an air somewhat between that of a shepherd and that of a man following the sea. He never laughed, that I heard; read long at the Bible; prayed much, like the Cameronians he had been brought up among; and indeed, in many ways, used to remind me of one of the hill-preachers in the killing times before the Revolution.

(*MM*, p.13)

Gordon Darnaway is introduced as a stereotypical Covenanter, of whom the best-known literary example is Davie Deans of Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*—long at his Bible, short on humour and modesty. Like the subject of Stevenson's parodic

poem, 'The Scotsman's Return from Abroad', Gordon Darnaway revels in the idea of a vengeful God and a sinning world:

O what a gale was on my speerit
To hear the p'intis o' doctrine clearit,
Set furth wi' faithfu' ministration!
Nae shauchlin' testimony here—
We were a' damned, an' that was clear.²⁷

However, Charles's expressed belief that the 'incredible vice' of drunkenness which his uncle 'had chosen', 'if it were credible in any one, was morally impossible in a man like my uncle', illuminates Charles's conceit above all else. 'The Merry Men' is not a new version of Burns's corrosively parodic poem, 'Holy Willie's Prayer'; it is not to expose the hypocrisy of 'the elect' that Stevenson's narrative works, but to deconstruct the much more materially powerful and dominating ideology of the Enlightenment. In fact, we might say that Enlightenment thought and writing practice, like its concomitant capitalist economics, *elects* itself as the norm and banishes difference to the peripheral purgatory of "this accursed island" (*MM*, p.40).

Gordon Darnaway's dialogue with himself allows a much more fluid conception of identity—and especially identity as dictated by modes of speech—than the contemporaneous wish to do away with 'Scotticisms' would sanction. It is Gordon Darnaway who expresses the various social and linguistic modes of eighteenth-century Scotland. He is a crofter and an ex-fisherman, born in the lowlands but living in the islands, and a speaker of Scots but a reciter of the Psalms "in the metrical version":

'Lord save us a'! but it's an unco life to be a sailor—a cauld, wanchancy life. Mony's the gliff I got mysel' in the great deep; and why the Lord should hae made yon unco water is mair than ever I could win to understand. He made the vales and the pastures, the bonny green yaird, the halesome, canty land—

"And now they shout and sing to Thee,
For thou hast made them glad,"

as the Psalms say in the metrical version. No' that I would preen my faith to that clink neither; but it's bonny, and easier to mind. "Who go to sea in ships," they hae't again—

“and in
Great waters trading be,
Within the deep these men God's works
And His great wonders see.”

Weel, it's easy sayin' sae. Maybe Dauvit wasna very weel acquaint wi' the sea. But troth, if it wasna prentit in the Bible, I wad whiles be temp'it to think it wasna the Lord, but the muckle, black deil that made the sea. There's naething good comes oot o't but the fish; an' the spentacle o' God riding on the tempest, to be shüre, whilk would be what Dauvit was likely ettling at.'

(MM, pp.15-16)

Responding to the specifically rhythmical nature of the Psalm Book (“‘it’s bonny, and easier to mind’”), rather than the theological content (“‘No’ that I would preen my faith to that clink’”), Gordon Darnaway’s speech reveals the interconnectedness of linguistic genres and dialects. His supposed imprisonment by an irrational, monologic faith is given the lie from his own mouth. To employ another different language, that of Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...], but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from here that one must take the word, and make it one’s own’.²⁸ Uncle Gordon seems adept at this recycling of language.

And if ‘The Merry Men’ recognizes the dialogical nature of language, it also focuses upon the ambiguity of experience as a counter to grand narratives and the practice of categorization—which is then reified, made normative, as *knowledge*. In one passage, Gordon Darnaway expounds upon the reality of sea-labour, (as Melville, Poe and Dana have been shown to do, by this thesis), as opposed to both the ignorant delusion which invests the sea with a sublime beauty—“‘Maybe Dauvit wasna very weel acquaint wi’ the sea’”; and, the anthropocentric will-to-know, exemplified by “‘the College’” of Enlightenment Edinburgh, which seeks to categorize and thereby control whatever it can:

I retorted hotly, crying out upon childish superstitions.

‘And ye come frae the College!’ sneered Uncle Gordon. ‘Gude kens what they learn folk there; it’s no muckle service onyway. [...] if ye had gane doon wi’ the puir lads in the *Christ-Anna*, ye would ken by now the mercy o’ the seas. If ye had sailed it for as lang as me, ye would hate the thocht of it as I do. If ye had but used the een God gave ye, ye would hae learned the wickedness o’ that fause, saut, cauld, bullering creature, and of a’ that’s in it by the Lord’s permission [...]. Oh, sirs,’ he cried, ‘the horror—the horror o’ the sea!’

(*MM*, pp.17-18)

This is a particularly impressive piece of writing. Stevenson manages to convey the uncle’s sneering contempt while simultaneously, by the narrative stance, situating the reader alongside the auditor, Charles. It is as if Gordon Darnaway is telling the reader to use “‘the een God gave ye’”, while also allowing the dialogical nature of Gordon’s speech to suggest the variables of discourse. So that, while it is ‘Charles’ who chooses the narrative he will tell, the very textuality of the telling serves to deconstruct his narrating position. As in *Moby-Dick*, the text produces meanings beyond the control of the narrating voice, a voice blind to its own contradictions. The narrating voice, expressive as it is of a specific ideological perspective, nevertheless carries within its own rhetorical performance the traces of alterity. Although the narrative emanates from one ‘character’, it is the production of many voices; so if we can say that the narrating voice is that of an Enlightenment, lowland, capitalist male, we can also suggest that the ‘self’ of this narrating voice ‘develops through contact with the other, and depends on that process of contact. It is not a monologue but a continuing series of dialogues.’²⁹ In ‘The Merry Men’, the narrating voice reproduces in its very form the dialogical character of national and cultural identities.

That dialogue in itself invokes possibilities, and discounts uniform histories, becomes a central theme of Stevenson’s art in this and other works—*The Master of Ballantrae*, ‘Thrawn Janet’, and, of course, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, can all be read from this point of view. Telling the story of his own battle with an unspecified sea-creature, Gordon Darnaway invokes the horror of the unknown, and unknowable, in an ambiguous phrase which echoes one in another Stevenson

story, 'Markheim'. In 'Markheim', the eponymous character, having killed a pawnbroker, falls into a kind of nervous reverie in which 'the sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness', and 'his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half-rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing'.³⁰ It is the absolute namelessness, and the impending erasure, which allow for the multiple *possibilities* of this story. And, in 'The Merry Men', it is specifically the unknowableness of the sea-creature which constitutes its horror, a horror which Charles, the narrator, will not accept:

'A' that nicht we foucht like men dementit, and the neist that we kened we were ashore in Loch Uskevagh, an' the cocks were crawling in Benbecula.'

'It will have been a merman,' Rorie said.

'A merman!' screamed my uncle, with immeasurable scorn. 'Auld wives' clavers! There's nae sic thing as mermen.'

'But what was the creature like?' I asked.

'What like was it? Gude forbid that we suld ken what like it was! It had a kind of a heid upon it—man could say nae mair.'

Then Rorie, smarting under the affront, told several tales of mermen, mermaids, and sea-horses that had come ashore upon the islands and attacked the crews of boats upon the sea; and my uncle, in spite of his incredulity, listened with uneasy interest.

'Aweel, aweel,' he said, 'it may be sae; I may be wrang; but I find nae word o' mermen in the Scriptures.'

'And you will find nae word of Aros Roost, maybe' objected Rorie, and his argument appeared to carry weight.

(MM, p.19)

Gordon Darnaway's brief call upon established authority for his argument is quickly undercut by Rorie's ironic insistence upon the difference between the supposed authority of the privileged written word and the material reality of things—specifically between "the Word" of God, and the physical actuality of Aros Roost. However, unlike his nephew, Gordon can admit "'I may be wrang'". The spoken word of "'Auld wives' clavers!'" is accorded a respect in this text which the written word, of 'the Scriptures' or 'the College' seems to be partly denied—but, it is precisely because the oral tradition of story-telling allows for possible other cases,

for ambiguities and inconsistencies, that it is supple enough to avoid the dead-ends and hypocrisies of authority.

'The Merry Men' seems to pay particular attention to the notion that language is a fully constitutive part of experience, not merely a reflection of it; that the world is shaped (and misshaped) depending upon the available, and deployable modes of discourse. 'In Memoriam James Joyce', Hugh MacDiarmid's long, polemical poem on 'world literature' and language, points to the centrality of speech in the making of the human world:

[...] speech actually shapes and extends our experience;
Not reproductions of the given
But conditions of anything being given
And of its progressive elaboration.³¹

MacDiarmid's poem seems to predict Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'postmodern condition', in which the linguistic formations are determinant of social reality; in which 'the social bond is linguistic, but [...] is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules.'³²

This attention to the materiality of discourse, and especially to the complex forms it weaves, contains faint echoes of Henry James's 'looming possibilities'. James, whose ideas and practice of writing are often cited—even by the writers themselves—as opposite to that of Stevenson, writes regarding the structure of his own novel *The Princess Casamassima*: 'My scheme called for the suggested nearness (to all our apparently ordered life) of some sinister anarchic underworld, heaving in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague notions and sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and general looming possibilities.'³³ Behind James's ostensibly conservative anxiety about a 'sinister anarchic underworld', we can trace an understanding of the hidden nature of the connections which make up the social and

cultural milieu; an understanding that the 'value' and the 'effect'—to use James's own words—which literary texts may be exemplary at mediating, 'were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what "goes on" irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface.'³⁴

It is the ability of words, and of texts, to resist the sanctions of authority which is an underlying theme of this thesis; in writing about specific economic and cultural practices, the writers I deal with have succeeded, for the most part, in using the malleability of language, its ability to suggest rather than merely 'tell'. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville makes it clear that the markings on the whale are not a language to be deciphered by Ahab, or Ishmael—or anybody; Poe writes to a similar theme in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (although most humanist critics, eager to dismiss that novel as a racist tract, have declined to see this); Hawthorne's 'subtle hints' and his use of an abstracted signifier as the central component, and title, of his greatest work, also work to this end. In Scotland, we have seen Alexander, Moir and Barrie variously experimenting with linguistic registers to create imagined textual worlds which can tell us something about the 'realities' of nineteenth-century Scotland. It is always with the problematics of interpretation, as opposed to a naive belief in linguistic transparency, that the texts read in this thesis have been concerned—'The Merry Men' is no different. Just as *Moby-Dick*'s markings are a symbolic rendering of the opacity of language; and, just as alphabet-type 'figures of the chasms' found by Pym both invite and resist interpretation, so, in 'The Merry Men', an attempt to 'read' natural phenomena as though they were a text becomes a cogent symbol of the will-to-know and to control.

The natural world, with its secrets, is a threat to Charles's ordered world; the 'complexity of forms, all swaying together in the current', creating a 'place of ambush' stand in opposition to Charles's search for wealth. And, earlier in the narrative, it is the natural world's resistance to interpretation which briefly unites Charles and his Covenanter uncle in bewilderment and fear:

In this northern bay—Aros Bay, as it is called—where the house stands and on which my uncle was now gazing, the only sign of disturbance is towards the end of the ebb, and even then it is too slight to be remarkable. When there is any swell, nothing can be seen at all; but when it is calm, as it often is, there appear certain strange, undecipherable marks—sea-runes, as we may name them—on the glassy surface of the bay. The like is common in a thousand places on the coast; and many a boy must have amused himself as I did, seeking to read in them some reference to himself or those he loved. It was to these marks that my uncle now directed my attention, struggling, as he did so, with an evident reluctance.

‘Do ye see yon scart upo’ the water?’ he inquired; ‘yon ane wast the grey stane? Ay? Weel, it’ll no’ be like a letter, wull it?’

‘Certainly it is,’ I replied. ‘I have often remarked it. It is like a C.’

He heaved a sigh as if heavily disappointed with my answer, and then added below his breath: ‘Ay, for the *Christ-Anna*.’

‘I used to suppose, sir, it was for myself,’ said I; ‘for my name is Charles.’

‘And so ye saw’t afore?’ he ran on, not heeding my remark. ‘Weel, weel, but that’s unco strange. Maybe it’s been there waitin’, as a man wad say, through a’ the weary ages. Man, but that’s awfu’.’

(*MM*, pp.20-1)

The problem of interpretation, and the need for signification are suggested in the ‘strange, undecipherable’ nature of the ‘sea-runes’; the natural world enters human socialization as a text, it is made into something to be read. In the prefacing ‘Note for The Merry Men’ (written for a later edition), Stevenson alludes to ‘those loving legends and beloved names that we engrave on the sea-sand before the return of the flood’, words which are ‘singly for himself’ (*MM*, p.xv); the individual makes a self-referential mark in the sand. And in ‘The Merry Men’ itself, the individual’s desire to find ‘some reference to himself’ in the intentionless forms of the natural world registers the search for an objective authority of signs. We will see in *The Ebb-Tide* a further example of Stevenson’s concern with the individual’s need to mark out their own existence through the use of external signs.

The chapter title “A Man Out of the Sea”, invokes the multiplicity of connections which ‘The Merry Men’ makes between the penetrating ideologies of capitalism and Enlightenment and the symbolic forms in which ideologies are carried. The search

for the wrecked *Espirito Santa*, of the Spanish Armada, constitutes the narrative and ideological drive of the text. In this search, Charles's 'dreams of wealth' (*MM*, p.29) join with the hegemonic impulse of the Enlightenment, and he ventures to Aros, much like the mysterious Spaniard, in order to claim his spoils of empire:

I fancied that the visitor 'with the gold rings upon his fingers' might be the same with Dr. Robertson's historian from Madrid. If that were so, he would be more likely after treasure for himself than information for a learned society. I made up my mind, I should lose no time over my undertaking; and if the ship lay sunk in Sandag Bay, as perhaps both he and I supposed, it should not be for the advantage of this ringed adventurer, but for Mary and myself, and for the good, old, honest, kindly family of the Darnaways.

(*MM*, pp.24)

Charles has some doubts about the ethics of his search, doubts which even the self-justificatory rhetoric about 'the good, old, honest, kindly family of the Darnaways' cannot erase. His anxiety is grounded in the alienation which empire visits upon both invader and native; his concern over 'the homelessness of men, and even of inanimate vessels, cast away upon strange shores' (*MM*, p.28) is in no small part due to his own homelessness, and the narrative is a record of his attempt to be other than the 'stranger' which Mary says he is.

Charles's invasiveness is constituted in his refusal to accept the alterity of Aros; his search for 'dead men's treasures' involves a desire to use the past in order to enrich, in a specifically pecuniary way, his own disjunctive present. The wreck of the *Espirito Santo*, in its very absence from the text, stands as an emblem of the breadth and rapacity of the European imperialist project: the absent wreck, existing only in 'some papers of an ancient date' (*MM*, p.8). Yet this unlocated ship carries the weight of the ideology of expansionism:

As I was told, in that tempest which scattered the ships of the Invincible Armada over all the north and west of Scotland, one great vessel came ashore on Aros, and before the eyes of some solitary people on a hill-top, went down in a moment with all hands, her colours flying even as she sank.

[...]. The *Espirito Santo* they called it, a great ship of many decks of guns, laden with treasure and grandees of Spain, and fierce soldadoes, that now lay fathom deep to all eternity, done with her wars and voyages, in Sandag Bay, upon the west of Aros. No more salvos of ordnance for that tall ship, the 'Holy Spirit,' no more fair winds or happy ventures; only to rot there deep in the sea-tangle and hear the shoutings of the Merry Men as the tide ran high about the island. It was a strange thought to me first and last, and only grew stranger as I learned the more of the way in which she had set sail with so proud a company, and King Philip, the wealthy king, that sent her on that voyage.

(*MM*, p.8)

That a ship representative of trade and empire should founder off the inhospitable periphery of the British state is fittingly ironic in the context of this narrative. The fact that the wreck Charles does come across 'was a foreign ship, but I was not certain of her nationality', suggests the intranational nature of the imperialist project, and the similarity between the different naval powers, as opposed to their differences.

Like Robinson Crusoe, a progenitive imperialist voyager, Charles is shocked by the 'unexplained appearance of a stranger', and, like Crusoe, his shock is increased by the man's blackness:

I was [...] startled by the sight that met my eyes. The form of a man stood upright on the cabin-hutch of the wrecked ship; his back was towards us; he appeared to be scanning the offing with shaded eyes, and his figure was relieved to its full height, which was plainly very great, against the sea and sky. I have said a thousand times that I am not superstitious; but at that moment, with my mind running upon death and sin, the unexplained appearance of a stranger on that sea-girt, solitary island filled me with a surprise that bordered close on terror. [...] I was assailed with doubts that made suspense unbearable, and, to put the matter to the touch at once, stepped forward and hailed the figure like a ship.

(*MM*, pp.52-3)

Focusing upon specific physical description, Charles's language marks the 'stranger' out as an object for observation, rather than understanding. The 'sight' is not 'a man', but '*the form of a man*' (emphasis mine) whose 'back was towards us'; as

empirical methodology demands attention be given to observable data, or 'sights'. And once the 'form' is recognized, it must then be brought into the subject's control in order to quell 'doubts'; still not 'a man', the 'figure' of the castaway is 'hailed' as if he is a vessel, and by this action, Charles's institutes his own hegemony over the castaway.

Charles's narrative of the castaway's short life on Aros is infused with the language of subjugation. It is only if the man of 'uncanny colour' will recognize Charles's authority that he will be allowed to stay; and it is the attempt to establish such authority which constitutes much of the last part of the story. The context in which Charles establishes some kind of relationship with, and a 'respect' for, this 'slave, as I supposed', who 'I saw [...] had a powerful mind and a sober and severe character, such as I loved to commune with' (*MM*, p.55-6), is dependent upon Charles's maintaining a sense of his own authority:

I called and signed to him to draw near, and he, on his part, dropped immediately to the sands and began slowly to approach, with many stops and hesitations. At each repeated mark of the man's uneasiness I grew the more confident myself; and I advanced another step, encouraging him as I did so with my head and hand. It was plain the castaway had heard indifferent accounts of our island hospitality; and indeed, about this time, the people farther north had a very sorry reputation.

I signed to him to follow me, which he did readily and with a grave obeisance like a fallen king.

I led the whole party round to where the gut was narrowest, swam to the other side, and called to the black to follow me.

(*MM*, p.53; p.54; p.58)

The castaway's unease comforts Charles, helping him make 'signs' of command. The entire relationship, at least from Charles's perspective, is that of the patrician slave-master; the 'kind' slave-owner who commands respect not through violence but through so-called strength of character and intelligence, through what Melville terms in 'Billy Budd, Sailor', the 'forms' of authority. And it is the instability of these forms which 'The Merry Men' represents in its narrative. Charles's inability to

impose his empiricist modernism on his uncle, to iron out the antagonistic presence of those whom his ideology would marginalize, is repeated in his attempts to forge a master-servant relationship with the 'slave'. The full irony of the situation is that it is the black man who is the 'Robinson Crusoe' in a strange land; he is the bearer of the imperialist message.

It is the overdetermined nature of signs which prevents Charles's assumed authority from becoming materially fixed. Because all he has are signs, his wished-for authority constantly eludes him:

I advanced accordingly towards the black, who now awaited my approach with folded arms, like one prepared for either destiny. As I came nearer, he reached forth his hand with a great gesture, such as I had seen from the pulpit, and spoke to me in something of a pulpit voice, but not a word was comprehensible. I tried him first in English, then in Gaelic, both in vain; so that it was clear we must rely upon the tongue of looks and gestures.

(*MM*, p.55)

The failure of spoken language to impose authority makes way for the language of physical action; and referring to the castaway's 'pantomime not to be described in words', Charles admits to the inefficacy of the text to replace physical actuality. Believing that the 'pantomime' of the events of the shipwreck, as acted out by the castaway, solves 'the mystery of his presence', Charles falls back upon the positivist language of empiricism; because the 'mystery', if there is one, is not to be 'solved' by a mere acting out of physical events, but lies beneath these events and beneath the narrative, in the hidden narratives of empire and internal colonialism.

It is not the difference, but the similarity between the historical position occupied by Gordon Darnaway and that of the 'fallen king' which provides a key to this story's dialectic: by bringing one of the overseas exploited and dispossessed into contact with one of Scotland's dispossessed—the first 'prepared for either destiny', the other 'biting his nails at destiny'—Stevenson establishes a direct relationship between the expansionist needs of capital and the unifying impulse of Enlightenment historicity.

This does not mean that 'The Merry Men' is a propagandist work meant to destroy the central planks of British and Scottish culture of the late nineteenth-century; rather, it is a textual rendering of the dialogue which takes place between vanquishing and vanquished—a dialogue which takes place whether the vanquisher wants it or not. 'The Merry Men' rejects intentionalism for textuality; it locates the social in the linguistic.

Those exploited and excluded by the 'progress' of enlightenment imperialism and capitalism are brought together on Aros; and there they die, as 'written'. The erasure by drowning of these two representatives of the vanquished in history is attributed to a divine power—just at the moment that Enlightenment ideology attains its supremacy, just as 'I was the means of cutting off the madman's last escape', it denies responsibility, the action being 'beyond the hands of men, [...] these were the decrees of God that came to pass before our eyes.' (*MM*, p.62) The complexities of Stevenson's writing in this story, in particular the correspondences and dissonances established between language and power, suggest a more fundamental questioning of the hierarchies of authority than a uniform and singular aversion to the specific evils and weaknesses of bourgeois capitalism.

Like most of Stevenson's best narratives, 'The Merry Men' deconstructs the particular ideological milieu of nineteenth-century Scotland to invoke the uncertain power of alterity, not to forward a specific political aim. So, while 'The Merry Men' does expose 'the Scottish subject [...] to property, the lure behind Capitalism', I do not think we can extrapolate from this and other works a wish on Stevenson's part to 'dethrone bourgeois Capitalism in Scotland.'³⁵ Such a reading risks making Stevenson no more than an unlikely forefather of Tom Leonard's 'calvinistic communist thit thoat ah wuz revisionist.'³⁶ Making Stevenson into an anti-capitalist icon serves as little purpose as declaring that 'Stevenson is much more logically conservative than we generally credit him with being.'³⁷ Neither supposed 'fact' serves a purpose beyond the ambiguous pleasure of 'knowing the mind' of a dead writer.

Stevenson's personal political beliefs, which are not a major concern of this thesis, are perhaps best summed up in Ian Bell's word, 'complicated':

He did not much like England and felt himself intensely Scottish, yet he later came to despise Gladstone (in part for 'deserting' General Gordon at Khartoum), associate with rabid Tories and oppose Irish agitation—accepting all the while that majorities in 'the lesser nations', Scotland and Ireland, found the Union 'obnoxious'.³⁸

Expressions of personal political views do of course enter Stevenson's work. For example, we can read a polemic against xenophobia, or a 'Protest on Behalf of Boer Independence'—'There may come a time in the history of England [...] when she also shall come to be oppressed by some big neighbour; and if I may not say there is a God in heaven, I may say at least there is a justice in the chain of causes that shall make England drain a bucket of her best blood for every drop she now exacts from the Transvaal.'³⁹ However, I do not point to these texts as biographical proofs of any particular political convictions of Stevenson's; rather, I am interested in them as ideological markers, allowing us to locate in his fictional narratives a dialectic of authority and resistance.

Reading two of Stevenson's major South Seas narratives, *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The Beach of Falesá'—alongside the 'Vailima Papers', detailing the specific political situation pertaining in Samoa at the time, and Stevenson's personal feelings about these circumstances—we can estimate the extent to which the fictional narratives mediate material events symbolically. Both *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The Beach of Falesá' evoke the contradictions adhering to the grand narrative of capitalist imperialism; also, they enact the racist mythology of uneven development whose ideological roots can be found in the very Enlightenment theory of progress which Charles Darnaway carried with him to Aros—so the narrative roots of the South Seas tales are present in 'The Merry Men'.

The pseudo-Darwinist ideology of white racial superiority, constructed and deconstructed in Stevenson's late fiction, was specifically tied to the practice of imperialist expansion; and, it neatly tied in with, and was indeed a form of, the broad ideology of Social Darwinism, with its 'survival of the fittest' sloganeering:

By occupying or controlling most of the globe, the European nations had demonstrated that they were the fittest to survive; and the exportation of their various economic, political and religious institutions was therefore a necessary step towards a higher form of human organisation in the rest of the world. It was also widely thought [...] that the dominance of the white races was itself the result of inherited superiority, [and...] the assumption that all evolution occurred in a single upward line of development was extended to include the necessary domination or destruction of inferior peoples by white civilisation. The wide acceptance of such racial doctrines did much to enlist popular support for the imperialist adventures of the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

This 'perversion and distortion of historical connections [...] becomes a straightforward apology for the brutal dominion of capital.'⁴¹

The Ebb-Tide and 'The Beach of Falesá' exhibit an awareness of the political and economic causes served by racist ideologies; an awareness manifested in Stevenson's accounts of his early travels in America. 'Despised Races', a chapter in *The Amateur Emigrant*, is a succinct record not only of Stevenson's personal animosity towards xenophobic beliefs, but also of the specific ways by which racism becomes a constitutive part of capitalist ideology and practice.⁴² Travelling by train from New York to California, Stevenson encounters and rejects the 'stupid ill-feelings' of 'my fellow-Caucasians towards our companions in the Chinese car.' And although specific 'reasons' for the anti-Chinese prejudice are given—'They could work better and cheaper in half a hundred industries, and hence there was no calumny too idle for the Caucasians to repeat, and even to believe'—it is the very variableness of xenophobic animosity which is established as a general principle:

[The whites] seemed never to have looked at [the Chinese], listened to them, or thought of them, but hated them *a priori*. The Mongols were their enemies in that cruel and treacherous battle-field of money. [...]

They declared them hideous vermin, and affected a kind of choking in the throat when they beheld them. [...]

These judgments are typical of the feeling in all Western America. [...]

A while ago it was the Irish, now it is the Chinese that must go. Such is the cry [...]. It was but the other day that I heard a vulgar fellow in the Sand-lot, the popular tribune of San Francisco, roaring for arms and butchery. 'At the call of Abraham Lincoln,' said the orator, 'ye rose in the name of freedom to set free the negroes; can ye not rise and liberate yourselves from a few dhirty Mongolians?'⁴³

Racism, then, is an ideological product of the specific practices of 'that cruel and treachorous battle-field of money.' Further, the targets of racist abuse change as economic circumstances change. By the end of the nineteenth-century, 'the Irish' no longer constituted an alien threat to American 'freedom', because they were by then sharing in the establishment of white American supremacy; so they are superseded by the Chinese as the enemy of 'the republic, which loved to depict herself with open arms, welcoming all unfortunates.'

Stevenson registers his 'fellow-passengers'' contempt for Native Americans with shame 'for the thing we call civilisation.' And as was to be made clear in his Samoan stories and 'Footnote to History', Stevenson sees economic and social exploitation as the defining features of the dialectical relationship between white settlers and indigenous peoples, a relationship which is given the metaphor of a text, as a 'chapter of injustice [and] indignity':

We should carry upon our consciences so much, at least, of our forefathers' misconduct as we continue to profit by ourselves.

[...]. Driven back and back, step after step, their promised reservations torn from them one after another as the States extended westward, until at length they are shut up into these hideous mountain deserts of the centre—and even there find themselves invaded, insulted, and hunted out by ruffianly diggers [...it is] a chapter of injustice [and] indignity.⁴⁴

It is interesting, and surprising, to note just how close the 'logically conservative'⁴⁵ Stevenson's analysis of this 'chapter of injustice' is to that of the nineteenth-century American radical, George Lippard, who, writing some forty years before Stevenson,

judged: 'from the day that the Pilgrim Fathers began to murder them for their land, as wild beasts are slain for their skin, down until the present year of our Lord, 1846, one bloody catalogue of wrong has been the Index to the history of the Indian race.'⁴⁶ While keeping in sight the historical actuality, it is worth noting the similar textual metaphor employed by each writer—the narrative of the 'Indian race' is given meaning, and its 'bloody' coda is exploitation and murder.

In one of the best critical essays ever written on Stevenson, Alastair Fowler recognizes in Stevenson's later fiction an interrogation of the limits of the ideology of capitalist imperialism. Writing of *The Ebb-Tide*, Fowler suggests that 'perhaps it is [a parable...] with political or anthropological edge.' Happily, Fowler proceeds to replace his tentative 'perhaps' with textual evidence of the tale's ideological 'edge'.⁴⁷ Fowler, for one, recognizes in Stevenson's South Seas writings an attempt to re-write, as it were, such 'chapter[s] of injustice and indignity' and deconstruct the imperialist myths which had been erected for the benefit of capital. Stevenson's narratives of the South Seas map the contended space of the South Pacific, and the struggle between the native islanders and the 'invincible strangers', as one Samoan chief termed the Western Powers.⁴⁸ Stevenson's texts delineate the specific contours of late nineteenth-century imperialism; a time when 'the gulf between a mechanised, unprecedented, affluent West and the exploited "other" [began] to gape dramatically. Only then were the European empires able to rush in and standardise, compelling the different continents into a global economy on their terms.'⁴⁹ Yet, as Fowler says when pointing to a 'significant resemblance' between Stevenson's writing and Joseph Conrad's, it is in 'the tentative forms of meaning', as opposed to directly referential polemic, that the full textuality of the work resides.⁵⁰

To bring out Stevenson's articulation of anti-imperialist discourse, it is worth quoting in full a footnote reference to him in a literary biography of Joseph Conrad, published in 1958. Determining that 'the question' of whether 'Conrad had read *The Beach of Falesá* before writing "Heart of Darkness" is unimportant', Albert J.

Guerard invokes the well-tried contrast between so-called deep and shallow literature—and, of course, it is Conrad who writes deeply, Stevenson shallowly:

The reader irritated by the hallucinated atmosphere and subjective preoccupation of 'Heart of Darkness' should turn to Robert Louis Stevenson's short novel, *The Beach of Falesá* [...].

Had Conrad read *The Beach of Falesá* before writing 'Heart of Darkness'? The question is unimportant. The important thing is to recognise the immense distance from Case's carved faces to the skulls on Kurtz's pallisade; from Case's pretended traffic with devils to Kurtz's role as one of the devils of the land; from Wiltshire's canny outwitting of a rival trader to Marlow's dark inward journey; from the inert jungle of Stevenson's South Pacific to the charged symbolic jungle of Conrad's Congo. The nighttime meeting of Case and Wiltshire is merely an exciting physical struggle. *The Beach of Falesá* is a good manly yarn totally bereft of psychological intuition.⁵¹

This chapter of my thesis explores exactly how and why Stevenson's tale is not 'a good manly yarn', but an exacting interrogation of the imperialist practices of the Western powers and the problematic of narrative subjectivity. Guerard's dismissal of Stevenson's story—for no good reason other than to elevate Conrad's 'charged symbolic jungle'—is evidence of a refusal to read Stevenson as other than a yarn-spinner, or of an insistence that the seeming matter-of-factness of his stories is proof of their inferiority.

More recently Ian Watt has followed Guerard, if a little more circumspectly, in his dismissal of Stevenson's importance as a literary 'influence' on Conrad. Defending Conrad's 'unique' exposure of anarchical colonialist brutality, Watt argues that :

The undeniable similarities of plot both between Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King' (1888) and Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress', and between Stevenson's 'The Beach of "Falesá"' (1893, in *The Island Night's Entertainments*) and *Heart of Darkness*, are hardly close enough to be convincing evidence of significant influence; and there is no reason to suppose that Conrad was particularly indebted either to Stevenson or Kipling beyond their part in creating an audience for exotic narrative.⁵²

One problem with Watt's analysis is its emphasis upon the idea of 'influence' between individual writers. Surely the more relevant point is that both 'The Beach of Falesá' and *Heart of Darkness* (or 'The Beach of Falesá' and then *Heart of Darkness*, if we want to play the 'influence' game), produce a social and linguistic world in which the contradictions of imperialism and its ideological blindspots are foregrounded, rather than obscured and made normative. To reduce the material interstices between Stevenson's textual rendering of South Seas rapaciousness and Conrad's 'dark, inward' symbols of European incursions into Africa to a question of 'influence' (or lack of influence, for Watt), merely conceals the presence of the social world beneath the mystique of authorial autonomy. (It is only fair to point out here that the greater part of Watt's book does concentrate upon Conrad's social milieu, and that his point regarding Stevenson is something of an aberration—made, as I suggested earlier, for the sole purpose of defending Conrad's 'uniqueness'.)

One French critic has pointed to Melville's South Seas narratives as precursors of some of the work of both Stevenson and Conrad; emphasizing the stylistic, as opposed to the referential content, this critic finds in the two later writers' different writing 'modes', analogues to the 'two voices' of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*:

They have shared out between themselves Melville's inheritance in the waters of the Pacific. Stevenson, admirer especially of *Typee* and of *Omoo*, in the picaresque mode, frivolous in appearance, fed from the English classic tradition and Conrad in the rhetorical mode of an obscure romanticism. They have divided the two roles and the two voices of *Moby Dick*. One conceals his sickness of life beneath the modestly light tone of the narrator and commentator, Ishmael, and the other reflects on life in the torments and imprecations of Captain Ahab.⁵³

We can acknowledge this literary 'inheritance', but must also heed Susan Manning's assertion that Stevenson's 'South Sea tales [...] are more than a footnote to Melville.'⁵⁴

The differences between the two versions of imperialist narrative (Stevenson's and Conrad's) are, however, major differences. It is Stevenson's ironic attitude to the

vagaries of metaphysical abstractions—as it is also Melville’s, Hawthorne’s and Poe’s—which gives his narratives their deconstructive edge, and while Conrad’s treatment of imperialist practice is now a legitimized area for critical discussion, I would argue that both *The Ebb-Tide* and ‘The Beach of Falesá’ present much more radical—in the sense of fundamental—alterities to colonialist discourse than does *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow’s return to Europe—he is on the Thames as he tells of his ‘inconclusive experiences’⁵⁵—constitutes a recentering of the narrative within the boundaries of so-called civilization, after the excursion to ‘Conrad’s Congo’. In ‘The Beach of Falesá’ especially, the narrative remains at the imperialist margin to the very last words of text. Stevenson’s tales, it seems to me, actively produce what Jeremy Hawthorne—echoing Ahab’s “Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command!”—has called the ‘loneliness of imperialism.’⁵⁶

Conrad’s story famously closes with the proto-modernist anxiety of a chaotic hell-on-earth, and the River Thames, mirroring the Congo—or vice-versa—is a route into this ambiguous “horror!”: ‘The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.’⁵⁷ In contrast, ‘The Beach of Falesá’ articulates a particular racist fear of white colonialism, ending with a question which is more than a ‘seemed’ but is in fact a direct challenge to the entire racist apparatus of Victorian colonialism:

I’m stuck here, I fancy. I don’t like to leave the kids, you see: and—there’s no use talking—they’re better here than what they would be in a white man’s country, though Ben took the eldest up to Auckland where he’s being schooled with the best. But what bothers me is the girls. They’re only half-castes, of course; I know that as well as you do, and there’s nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do; but they’re mine, and about all I’ve got. I can’t reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I’d like to know where I’m to find the whites?⁵⁸

The direct access which this passage gives us to Wiltshire’s fear of miscegenation allows no room for a ‘seemed’. That his daughters are ‘half-castes’, and thus the product of the feared miscegenation, only adds to the irony of the situation.

Wiltshire is abandoned at the margin of empire, a place so marginalized by colonialist market forces that 'the whites' with whom he wants his daughters to breed—presumably to restock the white 'race'—can not be located.

The difference, then, is that in Stevenson's narrative, while the subjectivity of the colonialist Wiltshire is privileged, it is done so as a means of ironic exposition; it is the language of empire, specifically its racist notations, which are finally undone by Wiltshire's 'taking' of a native wife. Although written from Wiltshire's 'point-of-view', to use the insufficient phrase of much literary criticism, 'The Beach of Falesá' constructs a discursive world in which the forgotten subjectivity of the indigenous native population is at least acknowledged, through the dialectic of narrative.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the colonialist facade of Christian charity is exposed through Marlow's meeting with 'The knitting old woman with the cat':

'It appeared [...] I was also one of the Workers, with a capital—you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways", till [...] I ventured to hint that the Company was being run for profit.'⁵⁹

That the Africans are seen as childlike, as needing 'weaning', fits the stock Victorian characterization of the colonial populations as needing European civilization; Stevenson himself indulges at times in this racist stereotype, in both the fictional works and 'A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa' (1892): 'Close at their [the whites'] elbows, in all this contention, stands the native looking on. Like a child, his true analogue, he observes, apprehends, misapprehends, and is usually silent.'⁶⁰

The paradigmatic 'true analogue' is in fact an ideological fixing of the native, representing itself as a show of concern. That it is Stevenson's 'intention' to be supportive of the Samoan people against the European and American Powers matters

mainly as proof of the inherent contradictions of the imperialist project and colonialist discourse; the language of a sympathetic European—Stevenson—merely reveals the depth of Victorian racist ideology. This is relevant to the politics of our present, because, as Homi K. Bhabha pointedly, if a little crudely, comments: ‘There is [...] a kinship between the normative paradigms of colonial anthropology and the contemporary discourse of aid and development agencies. The “transfer of technology” has not resulted in the transfer of power or the displacement of a neo-colonial tradition of political control through philanthropy—a celebrated missionary position.’⁶¹ Stevenson’s support for the Samoans is problematized, then, by what, following Stephen Greenblatt, we have referred to as his ‘practice of representation’.⁶²

However, in Stevenson’s South Seas stories, racist stereotyping is deconstructed and ironized; it is replaced by a network of conflicting ideological tropes, all competing with one another on the page of text. We have to track the dialogic interaction between the would-be authoritative language of capital and empire and the resisting modes of communication which deny the language of the core complete hegemony. Some of the impulses behind these narratives can be found in a less complex, more directly referential form, in ‘A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa’.

As is clear from the title of the piece, history is to be read as a text; a narrative with central motivations and marginal ones. If the failed Pentland rising was but ‘A Page of History’, then Samoan concerns are, from the subjectivity of the imperialist core, a mere ‘footnote’. Through a random conjunction of imperialist practice and natural circumstances, the word ‘footnote’ seems more ironic at the end of the narrative than it looked at the beginning: ‘the so-called hurricane of March 16th made thus a marking epoch in world-history; directly, and at once, it brought about the congress and treaty of Berlin; indirectly, and by a process still continuing, it founded the modern navy of the States. Coming years and other historians will declare the

influence of that' (*VP*, p.231). However, the concern of Stevenson's piece is the actuality of what happened in Samoa.

Carefully attending to the signifying practices by which power and submission were mediated and reproduced in Samoa, 'A Footnote to History' realizes a forceful understanding of the ideological loads carried by, and constitutive of, language and communication in general. In the Samoa of Stevenson's 'footnote', we see how the dissemination of power is effected, and how symbols of domination are concealed and interchangeable. Importantly, however, the means of disrupting the flow of this power are suggested within its own practices and structures; and in the 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb-Tide*, disruption of the imperialist-capitalist hegemony is brought about by ironic subversion of linguistic discourse.

Through a mixture of established Enlightenment historicity—imaging the difference between the South Seas islands and European capitalism as a time difference—and barely-veiled criticism of European 'adventurers', 'A Footnote to History' establishes the contentious nature of history: 'the condition—that they be let alone—is now no longer possible. More than a hundred years ago, and following closely on the heels of Cook, an irregular invasion of adventurers began to swarm about the isles of the Pacific. The seven sleepers of Polynesia stand, still but half aroused, in the midst of the century of competition' (*VP*, p.82). The Polynesian islands cannot resist the progress and incursion of capital, they cannot 'be let alone' because the European and American cores are capable, and needful, of imposing the economic and political forms of their 'century' onto the 'original island obscurity' of the Samoans (*VP*, p.111).

The forms which the dominance of the 'handful of whites' takes is specified, and it is through the narrative form of irony that the 'footnote' reveals the contradictions within and weak points of this dominance. The rules of 'the century of competition' ensure that the capitalists contend with each other for profits, but that they combine with each other to oppose threats to the system itself. It is noticeable how closely the

material world depicted in *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The Beach of Falesá' matches William Morris's scornful description of the dubious blessings bestowed by European capitalist imperialism upon 'the South Sea islander [...]: trousers, shoddy, rum, missionary, and fatal disease—he must swallow all this civilization in the lump, and neither himself nor we can help him now till social order displaces the hideous tyranny of gambling that has ruined him.'⁶³

In late nineteenth-century Samoa, a crucial part of the exploitative practice of the German and British traders was the importation of European bureaucratic and governmental structures, essential to the operation of the capitalist system. Stevenson's search for 'truth, in the midst of conflicting rumours and in the dearth of printed material' (*VP*, p.69), focuses on the reproduction of capitalist-imperialist structures at economic and political-administrative levels:

The only port and place of business in the kingdom, collects and administers its own revenue for its own behoof by the hands of white councillors and under the supervision of white consuls. [...] Here, then, is a singular state of affairs; all the money, luxury, and business of kingdom centred in one place; that place excepted from the native government and administered by whites for whites; and the whites themselves holding it not in common but in hostile camps, so that it lies between them like a bone between two dogs, each growling, each clutching his own end.

(*VP*, p.85)

The 'independent traders', of which type Wiltshire the narrator of *The Beach of Falesá* can be seen as representative, and 'the German firm' who control much of the land, share a common determination to protect 'their' property from Samoans who do not accept the imposition of European legalistic norms. The 'traders' and 'the firm' 'desired an efficient native administration, to open up the country and punish crime.' (*VP*, p.92). The ironic note struck by Stevenson's use of the seemingly objective word 'efficient', highlights the fact that the ideological force of the capitalist and imperialist systems are locatable in the technicalities of administration of 'law and order'. The pretence that 'crime' is anything other than a social construct is disarmed in this text, and the pretended 'objectivity' of colonialist discourse is dismantled; in Samoa, as elsewhere in the colonized world, 'for the native,

objectivity is always directed against him.’⁶⁴ Indeed, ‘the firm’ eventually established its own prison in 1883, a concrete and visible sign of the interconnected interests of business and the law: ‘Here was a private corporation, engaged in making money; to it was delegated, upon a question of profit and loss, one of the functions of the Samoan crown’ (*VP*, p.97). The competitive struggle among the capitalists is subsumed within a broader common agenda against the native population, for many of whom taking from the plantations seemed a ‘readjustment of a public wrong [...] the idea of theft in itself [being] not very clearly present to these communists’ (*VP*, p.95).

Within the ‘port and place of business’ the native population are estranged, the practices of the white colonialists being so dominant that ‘the natives walk in a foreign town’ (*VP*, p.84), and it is only at the boundary of the trading ‘centre’ and the unexploited ‘Neutral Territory’ that ‘Europe ends, Samoa begins’ (*VP*, p.85). And the Samoans, conscious of their ‘position as the common milk-cow’, articulate a subjectivity which reflects an awareness of their future possibilities: ‘one, stung by the last incident into an unusual flow of English, remarked to me: “I begin to be weary of white men on the beach.”’ (*VP*, p.87). And it is the beginning of Samoa, the beginning of active rebellion, which implies the end of Europe in the South Seas.

This rejection of the colonialist dominant informs the remainder of Stevenson’s historical narrative. It is the plantations’ exporting of food which is ‘Mumbo-Jumbo’ (*VP*, p.95); it is a ‘few lads at cricket’ who ‘harangue’ and give ‘ironical applause’ (*VP*, p.115); and, ultimately, with the onset of a storm, the American and German navies, at loggerheads with each other, are destroyed, ‘the hugest structure of man’s hands within a circuit of a thousand miles—tossed up there like a schoolboy’s cap upon a shelf; broken like an egg: a thing to dream of.’ (*VP*, p.222). This is a narrative of the limitations of imperialism, as much as of its capacities. Searching for ‘truth’, Stevenson discovers for the reader a web of contending and interdependent ideologies and practices; and it is in the unforeseen actions of the natural world, and

its combinations with the specific contingencies of human history in an 'infinite net of chance',⁶⁵ that these limitations are made materially manifest.

The process of 'improving' the island for profitable plantations sets 'the firm' against nature; the economic exploitation of the land changes the landscape so that 'even from the deck of an approaching ship, the island is seen to bear its signature'. This inscribing of European agricultural practices is given specific form: 'zones of cultivation showing in a more vivid tint of green on the dark vest of forest.[...] Hedges of fragrant lime enclose, broad avenues intersect them' (*VP*, p.88). Under the control of the plantation company, the forest is given linear shape, enclosed and hedged like a suburban garden or an English field. The land is transformed into a commodity, from which a second commodity, food, is extracted: and, Stevenson makes it quite clear, the 'food' that is produced on the plantation has little or no connection with the needs of the Samoans themselves:

For the Samoan [...] there is something barbaric, unhandsome, and absurd in the idea of thus growing food only to send it from the land and sell it. A man at home who should turn all Yorkshire into one wheatfield, and annually burn his harvest on the altar of Mumbo-Jumbo, might impress ourselves not much otherwise. And the firm which does these things is quite extraneous, a wen that might be exercised to-morrow without loss but to itself: few natives drawing so much as day's wages; and the rest beholding in it only the occupier of their acres. The nearest villages have suffered most; they see over the hedge the lands of their ancestors waving with useless coco-palms.

(*VP*, p.95)

This commodification of land and its produce suggests a clear link between the practices of the imperialist companies, backed by the gunboats of the European powers, in the Pacific, and the Highland Clearances, as bemoaned by Hugh Miller. To draw the parallel, and to note the significant similarities is not to *equate* simplistically the two very different situations; instead, it is to locate the complex structures of capitalist imperialism in its physical 'signatures'. These signatures are, however, variable, and the imposing order of the plantation's boundaries must be

contrasted with the supposed authority invested in the 'flags' of the imperialist nations.

The purely symbolic nature of a flag—it is *only* a symbol, nothing else—makes it peculiarly vulnerable to the erasure of signification. The contending German, 'English' and American interests represent themselves through their flags:

Weber's land claim—the same that now broods over the village in the form of a signboard—then appeared in a more military guise; the German flag was hoisted, and German sailors manned the breastwork at the isthmus— 'to protect German property' and its trifling parenthesis, the king of Samoa.

The Tamasese men quartered themselves in the houses of the absent men of the Vaimaunga. Disputes arose with English and Americans Leary [the American naval Commander] interposed in a loud voice of menace. It was said the firm profited by the confusion to buttress up imperfect land claims; I am sure the other whites would not be far behind the firm. Properties were fenced in, fences and houses were torn down, scuffles ensued. The German example at Mulinuu was followed with laughable unanimity; wherever an Englishman or an American conceived himself to have a claim, he set up the emblem of his country; and the beach twinkled with the flags of nations.

(VP, p.144; p.146)

And, it is the destruction of an American flag which triggers the face-off between American and German warships:

The one noteworthy event was the mutilation of Captain Hamilton's American flag. In one sense an incident too small to be chronicled, in another this was of historic interest and import. These rags of tattered bunting occasioned the display of a new sentiment in the United States; and the republic of the west, hitherto so apathetic and unwieldy, but already stung by German nonchalance, leaped to its feet for the first time at the news of this fresh insult.

(VP, p.206)

Invested with national identity, the flags of the imperialist powers are here metaphorical signifiers of the 'century of competition'. Stevenson's scathing tone in the last-quoted passage points to the irony which invests both *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The

Beach of Falesá' with deconstructive agency. It is language which has the potential to disarm the would-be hegemony of Europe and America. And, in 'A Footnote to History', it is language which the imperialist nations deploy to frustrate Samoan hopes of self-government.

Stevenson identifies the specific social and cultural realities at the root of language as the key to the frustration of Samoan autonomy. The Berlin Act, drawn up ostensibly to solve the 'trouble' in Samoa, is in fact a document which is meant *not* to be understood by the Samoans themselves. The importation of ideological and, therefore, linguistic paradigms from the Western world into Samoa has its apotheosis in the Berlin Act:

The draughtsmen of the [Berlin] act, waxing exceeding bold, employed the word 'election,' and implicitly justified all precedented steps towards the kingship according with the 'customs of Samoa.' I am not asking what was intended by the gentlemen who sat and debated very benignly and, on the whole, wisely in Berlin; I am asking what will be understood by a Samoan studying their literary work, the Berlin Act; I am asking what is the result of taking a word out of one state of society, and applying it to another, of which the writers know less than nothing, and no European knows much [...]. In such international—or, I should say, interparochial differences, the nearest we can come to understanding is to appreciate the cloud of ambiguity in which all parties grope.

'Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,
Half flying.'

(*VP*, pp.243-4)

It is not the rights or wrongs of the particular means of choosing the king of Samoa which is of concern here, or even the 'intentions' of the big Powers; it is the use of language to reinforce domination from the Western centre upon the Samoan periphery. It is, in the last instance, the reproduction through language, of the ideology of imperialist hegemony—the Act's meaninglessness (because unreadable) to the Samoan people is its main function; because the common concerns of capital outweigh the competitive differences. The 'cloud of ambiguity', which cannot be erased by Western documentation, remains as an undefinable barrier to Western

hegemony. So that while, 'in the last twelve months, our European rulers have drawn a picture of themselves, as bearded like the pard, full of strange oaths, and gesticulating like semaphores; [...] over against them Mataafa reposes smilingly obstinate, and their own retainers surround them, frowningly inert' (*VP*, p.245). Yet, even the obstinacy of the Samoan 'king' cannot hide the fact that 'if we come to war in these islands, and with no fresh occasion, it will be a manufactured war, and one that has been manufactured, against the grain of opinion, by two foreigners.' (*VP*, p.245).

The linguistic hegemony of the Western powers, then, has the ability to instigate civil wars thousands of miles from Europe or America. That the Act is meant not for the Samoans but for the Europeans and Americans, means that it stands as a signifier of the imperialist project. It is a linguistic imposition retaining fully the ability of language to be misunderstood, or uninterpretable, because 'the infamous protocol—a measure equally of German vanity, English cowardice, and American *incuria*—had not been and *has never yet been* translated into the Samoan language' (*VP*, pp.334-5).

The ways in which Stevenson's fictions ironize and deconstruct this imperial hegemony are varied. Focusing upon questions of identity, and making problematic the linguistic and symbolic representation of authority, 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb-Tide* use their very textuality, their very written-ness, to disarm the colonialist project. The last phrase in 'The Beach of Falesá' is this: 'I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites?'⁶⁶ Ten words expressive of imperialist anxiety, racist ideology and narrative ambiguity. Wiltshire, the narrator of the story, variously identifies himself with the 'white race', the imperialist project in general, with Britain in particular, but above all with the practices of capitalist 'trade'.

The particular ways in which 'trade' operated in the South Seas under European rule, and its specific connections with the imperialist project, are central to the narrative motivations of 'The Beach of Falesá'. The 'white men on the beach' of Falesá—of the type with whom the Samoan 'begin[s] to be weary' in 'A Footnote to History'—

provide the point of conflict and contradiction within the story. 'The beach', J.C. Furnas explains in *Anatomy of Paradise*, was 'South-Sea talk for the complex of interests, proverbs, and gossip emanating from the commercial element of an island. The people involved are either whites or part-whites or natives trying to live in white man's terms.'⁶⁷ Carrying with them the racist ideology of Victorian imperialism, Wiltshire and Case act out an episode of colonial violence, indifferent to the culture into which they have interjected themselves.

It is around the question of identity that the narrative revolves; both Wiltshire and Case live in and through the ideology of white supremacy, a common cause which ultimately is unable to erase the destructive capacities of 'the century of competition'. For the narrator, Wiltshire, it is his whiteness which fixes his position, unchallengeably, in the hierarchy of the islands. Arriving at Falesá, 'sick for white neighbours after my four years at the line, which I always counted years of prison' (Calder, p.102), he first meets Case, who 'would have passed muster in a city. He was yellow and smallish, had a hawk's nose to his face, pale eyes, and his beard trimmed with scissors. No man knew his country, beyond he was of English speech; and it was clear he came of a good family and was splendidly educated' (Calder, p.103). The class divisions of European society—'good family', education, speech—are imported wholesale into the South Seas.

Wiltshire's sickness 'for white neighbours' is ironically answered when he meets 'old Captain Randall':

Fat and pale, naked to the waist, grey as a badger, and his eyes set with drink. His body was covered with grey hair and crawled over by flies; one was in the corner of his eye—he never heeded; and the mosquitoes hummed about the man like bees. Any clean-minded man would have had the creature out at once and buried him; and to see him, and think he was seventy, and remember he had once commanded a ship, and come ashore in his smart togs, and talked big in bars and consulates, and sat in club verandas, turned me sick and sober.

(Calder, p.106)

The connections which Wiltshire never draws, being himself fully immersed in the racist ideology of the imperialist project, are fully visible in Randall's physical state. It is not Randall's difference which marks him out, but his symbolic representation of the whiteness which Wiltshire had longed for. No longer a man, but 'a creature', Randall is a premonition of the end of imperialist hegemony; representing all the privileges of colonialist rule, he stands as a sign of the essential hollowness of those privileges. Case's handshake to cement his alliance with Wiltshire in 'the White Man's Quarrel' (Calder, p.121), is a similarly empty sign of European hegemony: Case's handshake is seen to be meaningless other than as a ruse, its implication of 'civilized' behaviour merely undermining the assumptions behind that behaviour.

Reading 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb-Tide* as narratives of the limitations of imperialist hegemony, we can usefully look again to Frederick Turner's account of 'the significance of the frontier'.⁶⁸ Read critically, Turner's specific comments regarding the 'manifest evils' of American individualism, evils which 'frontier conditions' permit, can also inform our reading of Stevenson's South Seas narratives. Turner writes:

Economic power secures political power. But the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education, and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds, has its dangers as well as its benefits. Individualism in America has allowed a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit. In this connection may be noted also the influence of frontier conditions in permitting lax business honor, inflated paper currency and wild-cat banking.⁶⁹

Turner footnotes this passage with a reference to what he calls 'that line of scum that the waves of advancing civilization bore before them'—meaning gamblers, desperadoes and vigilantes. These 'dangers' of 'advancing civilization' are, however, as 'The Beach of Falesá' suggests, constitutive of the system itself; and Turner's wish to distinguish between good and bad, between 'liberty' and 'that line of scum', is an ideological strategy to distance the legal practices of capitalism from the

illegal—a distinction which, we can be sure, the black slave in America, or the exploited populations of the South Pacific and Africa would have found it difficult to make. Indeed, *Moby-Dick* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* inscribe the essential inhumanity of the legal practices of capitalism, as do ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and *The Ebb-Tide*.

Determinedly exploitative, capitalist ‘trade’ relies upon the labour of one set of human beings in order to create profits from their surplus labour for another set. It is Wiltshire’s *failure* to exploit the Kanakas which leads Case to mock him: “‘I give you my word I don’t want to shoot you. Why should I? You don’t hinder me any. You haven’t got one pound of copra but what you made with your own hands, like a Negro slave. You’re vegetating—that’s what I call it—and I don’t care where you vegetate, nor yet how long’” (Calder, p.154). Wiltshire’s doing things with his ‘own hands’ disqualifies him as a bona fide trader; manual labour is imaged as slavery, and that is the level at which such ‘lawful’ capitalism practised it.

Wiltshire’s attempts to compete as a legal trader with Case are the ostensible reason for his anger at the ‘taboo’ placed upon him by the islanders. And, his anger is fired by the fact that he is there for the ‘good’ of the islanders:

‘You tell them who I am. I’m a white man, and a British subject, and no end of a big chief at home; and I’ve come here to do them good, and bring them civilization; and no sooner have I got my trade sorted out than they go and taboo me, and no one dare come near my place! Tell them I don’t mean to fly in the face of anything legal; and if what they want’s a present, I’ll do what’s fair. I don’t blame any man looking out for himself, tell them, for that’s human nature; but if they think they’re going to come any of their native ideas over me, they’ll find themselves mistaken. And tell them plain that I demand the reason of this treatment as a white man and a British subject.’

(Calder, p.122)

Looking to his whiteness and Britishness for security and authority, Wiltshire represents what Frederick Turner would doubtless have termed the decent man of business; the individualist ‘looking out for himself, [...] for that’s human nature’,

who might be at the frontier of the wilderness, but who obeys the laws and lives honestly. This, however, would be to ignore the textual evidence which suggests not that Wiltshire is a miscreant trader, giving the business a bad name, but that in fact as its spokesperson, telling us of the difficulties of living in the South Seas 'prison', he is the voice of the imperialist mission. Wiltshire employs not the language and behaviour of the outlaw, but those of the law-abiding man whose side the law is on. Case himself invokes the 'law' of competition to dampen Wiltshire's anger at the boycott of his trade:

'I tell you you're not tabooed,' said he. 'The Kanakas won't go near you, that's all. And who's to make 'em? We traders have a lot of gall, I must say; we make these poor Kanakas take back their laws, and take up their taboos, and that, whenever it happens to suit us. But you don't mean to say you expect a law obliging people to deal in your store whether they want to or not? You don't mean to tell me you've got the gall for that? And if you had, it would be a queer thing to propose to me. I would just like to point out to you, Wiltshire, that I'm a trader myself.'

(Calder, p.125)

Case, the supposedly bad trader, here turns the laws of capitalism back on Wiltshire. Case is aware of his own complicity in the exploitation of the islanders, whereas Wiltshire refuses to see empire in this context—'It would be a strange thing if we came all this way and couldn't do what we pleased' (Calder, p.122). It is not the psychology of individual characters, but the laws of imperialist domination themselves which 'The Beach of Falesá' interrogates.

Wiltshire's outspokenness as a 'man of the world' leads to an unknowingly ironic account of his own 'trade'. In the account of his attack upon Case's 'graven images', Wiltshire reveals his complicity with us, the supposed colonialist reader. Itemizing the weaponry he takes into the forest for his attack, Wiltshire gives an aside on the quality of the merchandise he has been legally selling:

A mortal weight of gunpowder, a pair of dynamite fishing-bombs, and two or three pieces of slow match that I had pulled out of the tin cases and spliced together the best way I could; for the match was only trade stuff, and a man would be crazy that trusted it.

It seemed a senseless thing to leave the good lantern to blow up with the graven images. The thing belonged to me, after all, and was worth money, and might come in handy. If I could have trusted the match, I might have run in still and rescued it. But who was going to trust the match? You know what trade is. The stuff was good enough for Kanakas to go fishing with, where they've got to look lively anyway, and the most they risk is only to have their hand blown off. But for anyone that wanted to fool around a blow-up like mine that match was rubbish.

(Calder, p.159; p.163)

Wiltshire's presumes his reader to be a colonialist—'You know what trade stuff is'—as Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* presumes his to be capitalist shareholder: 'people in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest.'⁷⁰ This material manifestation of the ideological drives of capitalist and imperialist practices—the supremacy of the profit motive, and the denigration of the indigenous population ('good enough for Kanakas [...] only to have their hand blown off')—signifies the correlation between text and history, between language and objects.

In 'A Footnote to History' Stevenson attacks the fact that the Berlin Act 'has never yet been translated into the Samoan language' (*VP*, p.335), and it is with similar denials of native subjectivity that Wiltshire embarks upon his mission 'to make a fortune' (Calder, p.115). The shoddy goods he sells to the islanders embody the discursive tropes of colonialism, tropes which are insinuated throughout Wiltshire's narrative. The belief that 'it's a bad idea to set natives up with any notion of consulting them'(Calder, p.120) operates as a central motif to the narrative; and once more, the reader is implicated by being included in the 'we' of the narrating rather than the 'they' of 'the natives'. Wiltshire, like Marlow, is speaking to and for colonialism—and the irony of the narrative lies in the very fact that he is unaware of his hypocrisy and self-delusion.

To 'know' the colonized, to objectify them as uniformly alike, is a powerful trope of colonialist discourse. By fixing the colonized with a single or at the most, two,

stereotyped identities—for example, the native is either lazy or diligent, stupid or sly, violent or docile—the colonizer constructs his own identity as controlling subjectivity, as source of knowledge and meaning. Stevenson's own remarks in 'A Footnote to History' that children are the Samoans' 'true analogue', is echoed by Wiltshire. Case's 'ingenuity' gains Wiltshire's admiration:

With a box of tools and a few mighty simple contrivances he had made out to have a devil of a temple. Any poor Kanaka brought up here in the dark, with the harps whining all round him, and shown that smoking face in the bottom of a hole, would make no kind of doubt but he had seen and heard enough devils for a lifetime. It's easy to find out what Kanakas think. Just go back to yourself anyway from round ten to fifteen years old, and there's an average Kanaka.

(Calder, p.153)

We might wonder what 'an average Kanaka' would be 'from ten to fifteen years old'; presumably like 'us' at five years old? Wiltshire's fixing of the Kanakas as childishly gullible is the colonialist discursive process at work.

This process, whose ultimate aim is to de-humanize the colonized, depends for its apparent coherency upon the knowableness of the native, even though this process is an anxious one. The 'childishness' of the Samoans should be read, then, as an attribute of narrative subjectivity rather than a fact; it is a 'knowledge' whose ideology is unmediated. It is of the type described by Homi Bhabha as 'ambivalent':

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. [...And] the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated [...] as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.⁷¹

And it is the ambivalence of discourse, its ironic potential, which separates the narrative 'voice' of Wiltshire from that of 'the text'. It seems to me that the text, as it were, is aware of the irony inherent in discourse, whereas Wiltshire is not. Whether

or not Stevenson intends the complete deconstruction of the racist stereotype—and we have to remember his ‘true analogue’—this is nevertheless what the ‘The Beach of Falesá’ achieves. And it does this not by ‘proving’ the particular stereotype in itself to be false—after all, a new one, probably its binary opposite, would simply replace it—but by demonstrating the constructedness (and, so, potential disarticulation) of the discursive act itself. ‘The Beach of Falesá’ questions imperialist ideology by questioning the very act of signification itself. In this way, Stevenson’s interest in what Henry James chooses to call ‘the question of form’,⁷² can be seen not as a kind of aestheticism but, rather, as a direct involvement with the problem of articulation and authority.

The episode which articulates most clearly the colonialist practice of commodifying the native is the ‘South-Sea Bridal’. Yet, it is in this very episode that the ambivalence (to use Bhabha’s useful word) of colonialist discourse is first suggested. The ‘deception’ of the wedding ritual lies for Wiltshire in the fact that the book which the ‘grinning Negro [...] dressed with a big paper collar [...] made believe to read from was an odd volume of a novel, and the words of his service not fit to be set down’ (Calder, p.109). The service is completed by Case, acting as mock registrar, writing out the certificate, ‘signatures and all, in a leaf out of the ledger.’ The ‘certificate’ reads: ‘This is to certify that *Uma*, daughter of *Faavao*, of Falesá, island of —, is illegally married to Mr John Wiltshire for one night, and Mr. John Wiltshire is at liberty to send her to hell next morning’ (Calder, p.109).

The ‘shame’ of the episode turns on the fact that Wiltshire’s ‘bride’ does not understand the language in which the ceremony is conducted, and that the marriage contract is meaningless because of the wording, the ceremony and the use of the ‘novel’. It is analogous to the Berlin Act; unintelligible to the native. But, it is Wiltshire who has not understood the import of these events; by entering into a pretend contract he actually enters into a real one of mutual trust with a Kanakan woman. The symbols of marriage, Bible, priest, written words, are revealed as only symbols; and as only symbols, they can be replaced by other symbols—novel,

‘mountebank’, ‘a leaf out of the ledger’, because these carry the meaning which is imported into them.

The potential gaps which might open up between sign and meaning are further acknowledged in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, implicitly destabilizing the colonizer’s reading of the world. The imported European religious battle between Protestant and Catholic versions of Christianity is emptied of its symbolic differences by a native preacher, Namu. Tarleton, the white missionary, retells Wiltshire a story Namu had told him:

‘[...Namu] ended by confessing that he had been much concerned to find his people using the sign of the cross, but since he had learned the explanation his mind was satisfied. For Vigorous had the Evil Eye, a common thing in a country of Europe called Italy, where men were often struck dead by that kind of devil, and it appeared the sign of the cross was a charm against its power.

“And I explain it, Misi,” said Namu, “in this way: the country in Europe is a Popey country, and the devil of the Evil eye may be a Catholic devil, or, at least, used to Catholic ways. So then I reasoned thus: if this sign of the cross were used in a Popey manner it would be sinful, but when it is used only to protect men from a devil, which is a thing harmless in itself, the sign too must be harmless. For the sign is neither good nor bad, even as a bottle is neither good nor bad. But if the bottle be full of gin, the gin is bad; and if the sign made in idolatry be bad, so is the idolatry.”

(Calder, pp.136-7)

It is the meaning attributed to a ‘sign’, or the use to which a bottle is put, which carries value, not the sign (or bottle) itself. Emptied of Christian signification, the sign of the cross loses its value as a sign of Catholic belief. For the Kanakas, it signifies not the European religious divide but native custom; the central icon of Christianity is appropriated into native discourse. The cross-currency of the cross points up the fluid nature of culture; culture always being a site of signs and interpretations of signs. The supposed hegemony of the European colonizers is forced into dialogue with the resident customs. The two cultures exist in a space which, to use Cairns Craig’s phrase, is ‘between’: ‘Culture is not an organism, nor a

totality, nor a unity: it is the site of a dialogue, it is a dialectic, a dialect. It is being between.’⁷³

When Wiltshire goes to discover the truth of Case’s icons, he mocks Uma’s belief in devils, her ‘Kanaka ignorance’, by showing her the inside of a Bible:

I turned to the title-page, where I thought there would likely be some English, and so there was. ‘There!’ said I. ‘Look at that! “*London: Printed for the British and Foreign Bible Society, Blackfriars,*” and the date, which I can’t read, owing to its being in these X’s. There’s no devil in hell can look near the Bible Society, Blackfriars. Why, you silly,’ I said, ‘how do you suppose we get along with our own *aitus* at home! All Bible Society!’

‘I think you no got any,’ said she. ‘White man, he tell me you no got.’

‘Sounds likely don’t it?’ I asked. ‘Why would these islands all be chock full of them and none in Europe?’

‘Well, you no got bread-fruit,’ said she.

I could have torn my hair. ‘Now, look here, old lady,’ said I, ‘you dry up, for I’m tired of you. I’ll take the Bible, which’ll put me as straight as the mail, and that’s the last word I’ve got to say.’

(Calder, p.158)

Wiltshire is forced into arguing the opposite of what he actually believes; he advances the idea of a pagan Christianity, and uses the inside cover of the Bible to further his ‘argument’. Because ‘a sign does not simply exist as a part of reality—it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore it may distort that reality or be true to it,’⁷⁴ it is the ideological use to which the signs are put which matter, not the signs in themselves. In this case, Wiltshire’s attempt to manipulate the printed word for his own purpose ironically turns out to work against him—the Bible which he then has to carry with him, to ‘prove’ its effect against ‘devils’, being ‘a book as big as your head’ (Calder, p.163).

‘Alone in my glory’, after killing Case, Wiltshire is dealt ‘a meanish kind of revenge’ by Tarleton the missionary. Tarleton gives his ‘pledge’ to the natives that Wiltshire will ‘deal fairly’ with them; that his ‘trade’ will be above board. Here we have the final irony of the story; Wiltshire’s belief that what is ‘fair’ for the natives is

unfair for him. The profit motive, the driving force of capitalism, is made into a question of honour rather than legality. The economic exploitation which Wiltshire wishes to practice is anathema to the Kanakas, property-owning is shown to be specific and not normative, although of course Wiltshire does not recognize this—nor do ‘you’, the reader: ‘As for the old lady, you know her as well as I do. She’s only the one fault. If you don’t keep your eye lifting she would give away the roof of the station. Well, it seems it’s natural in Kanakas’ (Calder, p.169).

Questioning the authority of the trading whites, suggesting the variability of signification and cultural practices, ‘The Beach of Falesá’ attests to the ambivalence of colonialist discourse; to its anxious dependence upon reductive readings of the native and the native world. In *The Ebb-Tide* this ambivalence becomes fully articulated in a text of shifting signification and emptied ideologies. Wiltshire’s final words of anxious racism ‘I’d like to know where I’m to find the whites?’ (Calder, p.169) attest to his blindness, and thus the blindness of the colonialist discourse, to the contradictions of his narrative. The one thing his story predicates is the impossibility of complete hegemony, and the failure of the colonialist project.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator employs the language of natural science, and specifically that of organic reproduction, to construct a metaphor for imperialist expansion. Figuring the earth as female, ‘into the mystery’ of which the ‘messengers of the might within the land’ had floated, the text mediates empire as biological phenomena, as natural growth: ‘Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch [...]. The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.’⁷⁵ The nineteenth-century’s ‘discovery’ of the laws of evolution provided a whole vocabulary from which metaphorical constructions for the material world could be built. However, *The Ebb-Tide* connects colonialist practice and natural law not as metaphor or discursive trope, but as event. The notion of ‘seed of commonwealth [...] germs of empires’ is ironized into degenerate infection: ‘Throughout the island world of the Pacific,

scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease'.⁷⁶

The directness of this opening line prepares us for the remainder of the narrative, which is shorn of any sympathy for the colonialist project. Unlike Marlow's seductive yarn-spinning, Wiltshire's voice projects no possible case *for* empire. It neither promises nor promotes any 'redeeming idea' behind empire, either religious or administrative. Marlow's honest admission regarding the construction of empires is prefigured in Stevenson's narrative in the character of Attwater in particular. Marlow says: "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much"⁷⁷—which is precisely what *The Ebb-Tide* does; it looks into it. The very form of Conrad's narrative—in which a 'moral' but confused sailor, Marlow, tells a captive audience of his encounter with the demi-God Kurtz—seems to lend ideological weight to the case *for* colonialism. By treating it with grandeur and respect, Conrad imbues colonialism with a warped nobility—as if it is Europe's tragedy not Africa's. Stevenson does not do this, rather he seems to me to find the appropriate form for a narrative of colonial deracination and degeneracy—a form laying emphasis upon the emptiness of the imperialist project. Frederic Jameson tendentiously uses Stevenson as a marker against whom to measure, (of course!), Conrad; whereas Stevenson's writing in fact exhibits in itself the contours of 'the emergence of contemporary narrative' which Jameson is so keen to locate in Conrad's work. Jameson writes:

Nothing is more alien to the windless closure of high naturalism than the works of Joseph Conrad. Perhaps for that very reason, even after eighty years, his place is still unstable, undecidable, and his work unclassifiable, spilling out of high literature into light reading and romance, reclaiming great areas of diversion and distraction by the most demanding practice of style and *écriture* alike, floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson.⁷⁸

It seems to be taken almost tautologically that next to Conrad, Stevenson is 'light reading'; and the critic feels no need to justify the label. And anyway, it is Conrad's

‘greatness and originality’ which matter, as with the Guerard and Watt quotations given earlier; Stevenson is simply a fixed marker, presumably for ‘low literature’, as Proust clearly represents ‘high’.

I propose readings of Stevenson which are more than mere unfavourable comparisons with Conrad; it is important to move entirely beyond the form of criticism which seeks merely to establish how Stevenson was of minor or no ‘influence’ on the author of the ‘unique’ *Heart of Darkness*. Ironically for this thesis, Stevenson has often been read, by Watt and Jameson for example, as ‘peripheral’, and Conrad as ‘central’. Beyond the question of ‘influence’ lies the case for the appreciation of Stevenson’s own writing as a register of late nineteenth-century anxieties in itself.

The world of *The Ebb-Tide* is strangely emptied of significance beyond the material. The symbolic becomes a mode of concealment not revelation, for obscuring rather than illuminating reality. This short novel is perhaps Stevenson’s greatest attempt at a narrative formulation of the shifting significations of the material world. In ‘the old calaboose’, the dismemberment of colonial rule is visible in the physical structure of the building itself: ‘Within was a grassy court, littered with wreckage and the traces of vagrant occupation. Six or seven cells opened from the court: the doors, that had once been locked on mutinous whalersmen, rotting before them in the grass. No mark remained of their old destination, except the rusty bars upon the windows’ (Calder, p.193).

The graffiti on the wall of the cell in which Herrick, Huish and Davis shelter from the sun stands as a visible sign of the ongoing attempt to inscribe human history upon the world. The meaninglessness of the inscriptions is emphasized; they articulate no meaning to Herrick, because his eyes are merely ‘skimming the legends on the wall’. The ‘Tahitian names, and French, and English, and rude sketches of ships under sail and men at fisticuffs’, are being erased by natural processes—the ‘crumbling whitewash’—and with this process the past loses its signifying markers.

Herrick wants to leave 'a memorial of his passage', a record of a dead man. Recognizing the contingency of the material world, Herrick has a 'strong sentiment of coming change; whether good or ill he could not say: change, he knew no more—change with inscrutable veiled face, approaching noiseless' (Calder, pp.193-194).

The unknowableness of the future, its silent approach, informs the narrative with dramatic possibility. And it is through the dramatic and melodramatic that *The Ebb-Tide* constructs a way of telling. Because the dramatic relies upon the reading and interpretation of surfaces—it offers an absence, we might say, of subjectivity—then *The Ebb-Tide* is a powerful articulation of the unbridgeable gap between symbol and meaning; the surfaces which it presents, and which are presented to the 'characters' in it, seem to hold all the meaning and none. It is a narrative which invests heavily in the reality of the physical, in the hollowness of theologies; yet, paradoxically, the physical, because it is seen to lie outwith the possibilities of 'meaning', seems inadequate.

If we first look at the ways in which *The Ebb-Tide* constructs its critique of colonialism, and then move on to consider the heightened textuality of its narrating, its attempted erasure of the symbolic order, we can measure the achievement of Stevenson's art in this late fiction.

The 'memorial of his passage' which Herrick decides to leave is apposite—a few bars of music. The least directly referential of art forms, music holds for Herrick the possibility of endless reproduction of his own sophistication:

The vision of a concert room, the rich hues of instruments, the silent audience, and the loud voice of the symphony. 'Destiny knocking at the door,' he thought; drew a stave on the plaster, and wrote in the famous phrase from the Fifth Symphony. 'So,' thought he, 'they will know that I loved music and had classical tastes. They? He, I suppose: the unknown, kindred spirit that shall come some day and read my *memor querela*. Ha, he shall have Latin too!' And he added: *terque quaterque beati Queis ante ora patrum*.

(Calder, p.194)

Herricks's signature is that of Western culture, posting into the future its own completeness and the fixity of its 'classical tastes'. The hunger of Western culture for 'meaning', for humanist interpretation, is mediated in the ensuing conversation between Herrick, the 'cultured' Englishman, and Davis, the uncultured American:

'What's that?' [Davis] cried, pointing to the music on the wall.
'What?' said the other. 'O, that! It's music; it's a phrase of Beethoven's I was writing up. It means Destiny knocking at the door.'
'Does it?' said the captain, rather low; and he went near and studied the inscription. 'And this French?' he asked, pointing to the Latin.
'Oh, it just means I should have been luckier if I had died at home,' returned Herrick impatiently. 'What is this business?'
'Destiny knocking at the door,' repeated the captain;
(Calder, p.196)

Davis's repetition of Herrick's interpretation of the 'meaning' of the Beethoven piece renders the passage, and Herrick's solemnity, vaguely ridiculous. In parodying Herrick's portentous tone, Davis effects a parody of the 'culture' which produced the music—'destiny' in this narrative comes in the shape of piracy, drunkenness, and colonial brutality; and they are all products of the very same 'culture' which moulded 'the famous phrase from the Fifth Symphony.'

This deconstruction of Western romantic conceptions of art and culture, of the 'meaning' of symbols, becomes more deeply embedded in the text of *The Ebb-Tide* as the narrative progresses. Herrick's awareness of the importance of forms, of the way in which living and working are role-playing—in which identity is not an essence but a dialectic—is evident in his call to Davis: "'For heaven's sake, tell me some of the words,'" (Calder, p.206). In order to play the 'role' of shipmate, he needs to know the appropriate words, the appropriate forms of authoritative utterance. The analogy can be drawn with the words of Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*:

'With mankind,' he would say, 'forms, measured forms, are everything; and this is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.' And this he once applied to

the disruption of forms going on across the Channel and the consequences thereof.⁷⁹

Herrick needs to adopt the 'form' of a mate in order to have authority in that role; his identity is seen to be a composite of the various roles he plays in the narrative—cultured gentleman, pirate, ship's mate. And, as each of these forms is stripped from him, the act of signification is demystified.

The metaphor of theatre is recurrent, producing a space of 'effects' between scenery and the gaze of both the reader and the characters: a storm passes 'sudden as a trick-change upon the stage', then Herrick 'felt there was a scene to go through' with Davis (Calder, p.223); arriving at the island, 'suddenly the curtain was raised [and ...] the schooner opened out successive objects with the swiftness of a panorama' (Calder, pp.238-239); Attwater's face is an 'ambiguous and sneering mask' (Calder, p.252); 'the isle, at this hour, with its smooth floor of sand, the pillared roof overhead, and the prevalent illumination of the lamps, wore an unreality, like a deserted theatre or a public garden' (Calder, p.269); and, on the final page we are told the scene 'a month since the curtain rose on this episode' (Calder, p.299). Importantly, it is the characters themselves who watch the story progress as a drama unfolding; it is the captain who is 'in the four cross-trees, glass in hand, his eyes in every quarter, spying for an entrance, spying for signs of tenancy. But the isle continued to unfold itself in joints, and to run out in indeterminate capes; and still there was neither house nor man, nor the smoke of fire' (p.237). And Attwater's roost is "'instantaneously disclosed'" to them (p.239).

Bertolt Brecht praised Stevenson's 'cinematic eye', emphasising that it existed 'before the cinema';⁸⁰ passages such as that last quoted suggest that by the time of *The Ebb-Tide* Stevenson had developed a prose style—almost a trick—allowing the reader to see through the eye of the character yet at the same time also observe the character observing the scene. It is an ironic mode of narrative, revealing the problematic construction of subjectivity. This conscious deployment and subsequent deconstruction of the modes of narrative agency suggests that *The Ebb-Tide* can be

judged an 'innovative text' by Raman Selden's criteria: disconnecting 'to some extent the elements of ideologies, not by effecting a reorganization of a discourse but by dissolving its imaginary unity.'⁸¹

Alastair Fowler locates a theological or spiritual message in *The Ebb-Tide*; therefore, he argues, 'demythologising itself is shown to be a form of fiction'.⁸² But I believe we can point to the radical dislocation of meaning in *The Ebb-Tide* to suggest that the 'fiction' which Fowler locates is self-knowing. The inversion of the norms of the fiction—or narrative—of imperialism, as mediated in *The Ebb-Tide*, make for a fuller deconstruction of empiricist ideology and theological discourses than Fowler allows.

In the story told to Herrick by the old Samoan Taveeta, the interpretative gap between contending cultures opens up. Demanding subjectivity, "no call me Uncle Ned [...] No my name! My name Taveeta" (Calder, p.218), Taveeta tells Herrick of the fate of the previous captain of the ship. At the bottom of the story is the fact that the captain Wiseman, and his mate Wishart, could not and would not understand a native sign:

There was a great village, a very fine village, and plenty Kanakas in that place, but all mighty serious; and from every here and there in the back parts of the settlements, Taveeta heard the sounds of lamentation. 'I no savvy *talk* that island,' said he. 'I savvy hear um *cly*. I think, Hum! too many people die here.' But upon Wiseman and Wishart the significance of that barbaric keening was lost. Full of bread and drink, they rollicked along unconcerned, embraced the girls, who had scarce energy to repel them, took up and joined (with drunken voices) in the death-wail [...]

(Calder, pp.219-220)

Missing the 'significance' of the native cries, the Europeans lose their lives; seeking the fulfillment of their lusts, they die. The narrative of *The Ebb-Tide* seems to be driven by a blindness to signs; the inability to penetrate beyond material surfaces to a deeper 'meaning'. The episode of the 'champagne' bottles which turn out to be filled with water makes this point directly: 'Case after case came up, bottle after

bottle was burst, and bled mere water. Deeper yet, and they came upon a layer where there was scarcely so much as the intention to deceive; where the cases were no longer branded, the bottles no longer wired or papered, where the fraud was manifest and stared them in the face' (Calder, p.227). Drawing an analogy with 'Crusoe', Stevenson locates their anxiety in an imperialist fiction—the refusal to believe in the existence of an alterior reality to their own.

Attwater, the island's tyrannical ruler, is the very type for whom there is no alterity to their own reading of the world. He stands as a symbol of the 'fact that the individual colonist's power, combined with the lack of any effective control, was an open invitation to every kind of cruelty and abuse'⁸³; as Ian Watt has written of Conrad's Kurtz. Attwater's presence on the island, and in the text, is as a sign of the rapacity lying at the heart of the colonialist project. It is not anachronistic that 'there was to be descried in the deep shade of the verandah a glitter of crystal and the fluttering of white napery', nor is Attwater's sharpened courtesy—"I have a dry sherry that I would like your opinion of"—ironic in any way. Instead, it informs the story's concern with imperialist practice; it is precisely the conviction in the absolute rightness of his forms of behaviour which leads Attwater, as a colonizer and trader, to carry out and impose his will with violence. Like Ahab, Vere, Captain Thompson in *Two Years Before the Mast*, Attwater is cruel because the social and economic structure permits and demands it.

The figure head on the beach may well be a symbol of the grounded imperialist mission, but Attwater does not believe it is grounded. Herrick regrets the end of empire, not its consequences, and it is the text itself which builds an alternative view to Herrick's and Attwater's:

A woman of exorbitant stature and as white as snow was to be seen beckoning with uplifted arm. The second glance identified her as a piece of naval sculpture, the figure-head of a ship that had long hovered and plunged into so many running billows, and was now brought ashore to be the ensign and presiding genius of that empty town.

The figure-head confronted him with what seemed irony, her helmeted head tossed back, her formidable arm apparently hurling something, whether shell or missile, in the direction of the anchored schooner [...]. Herrick looked up at her, where she towered above him head and shoulders, with singular feelings of curiosity and romance, and suffered his mind to travel to and fro in her life history. So long she had been the blind conductress of a ship among the waves; so long she had stood here idle in the violet sun, that yet did not avail to blister her; and was even this the end of so many adventures? he wondered, or was more behind? And he could have found it in his heart to regret that she was not a goddess, nor yet he a pagan, that he might have bowed down before her in that hour of difficulty.

(Calder, p.239; p.249)

The material emblem of empire is ironically used to represent the end of empire, even as Attwater continues his despotic rule—"I have [...] a business, and a colony, and a mission of my own. I was a man of the world before I was a Christian; I'm a man of the world still, and I made my mission pay. [...] I gave these beggars what they wanted." (Calder, p.253).

Fixing the natives into "two types [...] the obsequious and the sullen", Attwater renders them knowable and thus sees them as commodities. Yet, in the narrative of Attwater's cruel rule are hints of the subjectivity of the colonized. It is the anxiety of power which underlies the "regulation" that "we allow no explanations; none are received, none allowed to be offered" (Calder, p.267); Attwater's objectification of the natives, his insistence upon his rule, right or wrong, betrays the ideological blindness of the culture whose symbols are Beethoven's Fifth and 'white napery'. The humanist-Christian discourse is deconstructed and revealed as a discourse of power and exploitation; the denial of alterity is at its very roots. 'Bursting with pride and ignorance',⁸⁴ the colonialist inhabits an anxious ideology; unwilling to believe that his 'identity [is] formed by the Imperialist experience.'⁸⁵

In 'The Merry Men' Stevenson plotted the encroachment of the European enlightenment into the 'corners' of Scotland; in 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb-Tide*, he followed the path of colonialism to the South Seas. In none of these fictions

does he elide the facts of exploitation, hegemonic economic practices and the drive for cultural homogeneity. But, equally, they each suggest the alterity of the dispossessed voices, the transience of European hegemony and the constructedness of humanist identity.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. John Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (London, 1992), p.221.
2. Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (1984; rpt. London, 1993), p.175.
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I have translated the original passage, which reads:

'[...] ils se répartissent l'héritage de Melville dans les eaux du Pacifique. Stevenson, admirateur surtout de *Typee* et d'*Omoo*, sur le mode picaresque, frivole en apparence, nourri de la tradition classique anglaise et Conrad sur le mode rhétorique d'un romantisme ténébreux. Ils se partagent les deux rôles et les deux voix de *Moby Dick*. L'un dissimule son mal de vivre sous le ton pudiquement léger du narrateur et du commentateur, Ismaël, et l'autre redonne vie aux tourments et imprécations du capitaine Achab.'

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73. Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, p.206.
74. *The Bakhtin Reader*, edited by Pam Morris, p.51.
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Conclusion

In his book *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd argues for the inclusion of Irish culture in debates on post-coloniality. Kiberd feels that 'the "mixed" nature of the experience of Irish people, as both exponents and victims of British imperialism' makes their culture 'representative of the underlying process' of decolonization.¹ In some ways, Scotland is similarly compromised by the practices of British Imperialism as they impinged on overseas peoples. And despite Tom Nairn's protestations, some parts and some people of Scotland also felt the effects of an internal form of colonialism. Similarly, if more brutally, the Native American people were decimated by the expansionist policies of the 'free', 'democratic' republic of the United States of America; and, as Frederick Douglass is witness, the systematic use of slavery in that country is an equally shameful and despicable part of its historical record.

In this thesis, I have attempted to bring together disparate texts and writers, linked by their common interest in the discursive production of identity. Through their engagement with the national, class, religious or individual projections of identity, the texts used in this thesis display what I believe is a dynamic understanding of the complexities of discourse as it impinges upon ideological formations. If, for example, Edgar Allan Poe in Baltimore and William Alexander in the north-east of Scotland seem too far apart to justify their cohabitation in a thesis, then perhaps the wrong yardstick is being used. Both writers traced the social and ideological markers of their particular corners of the globe; and the Manifest Destiny of Poe's America is reciprocated by the agrarian capitalism of Alexander's Scotland. Alexander's novel in particular seems to me to offer resistance to the revisionist process in which 'large tracts of the Scottish past have been affected in ways reminiscent of the distortive actions of colonialism upon "third world" cultures.'²

It is the connected and mutually supportive practices of imperialism and capitalism which ultimately connect Poe and Alexander, Melville and Barrie, or even Tom

Nairn and Samuel Johnson. Because these two ideologies were so dominant in the nineteenth century, and continue to be so today, if in different forms, they seem to muscle in on all manner of literary texts and cultural artefacts. And because it is through language and symbolism that ideologies reproduce themselves, it is only natural that they should be locatable in the best writing. The core-periphery paradigm, while still having some mileage left in it, needs to be understood as a expressing a variable relationship rather than a static one if it is to retain any force as a rhetorical and structural trope. If we are to read American or Scottish writers, or Irish, from a post-colonialist perspective, it is important to understand that we could equally read English writers from such a perspective; again, it is the dominance of imperialist-capitalism which makes it necessary to see its common effects everywhere, and the 'primacy of human labor to human identity'.³

In *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Herman Melville deconstructs the idea, and ideal, of fixed individual identity with something approaching contempt. It is a brilliant novel, and its evocation of 'a culture without authority'⁴ is both frightening and liberating. It seems to me that Stevenson and Hawthorne, Dana and Barrie, Poe and Alexander all approach, in different ways of course, an understanding of the complex matrix which constitutes identity, its social determinants above all else. Like the narrator of *The Confidence-Man*, all of these writers would understand the contingency which lies at the heart of signification and meaning:

As no one man's experience can be coextensive with *what is*, it may be unwise in every case to rest upon it. When the duck-billed beaver of Australia was first brought stuffed to England, the naturalists, appealing to their classifications, maintained that there was, in reality, no such creature; the bill in the specimen must needs be, in some way, artificially stuck on.⁵

Notes to Conclusion

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